

## 1993: ST. MICHAEL'S CONFERENCE SERMON

*"What shall I give unto the Lord  
for all the benefits that he hath  
done unto me?" (Psalm 116:12)*

This conference is named in honor of St. Michael the Archangel who leads us into battle armed with the sharp two-edged sword of God's word. St. Michael is our patron because our purpose is clear and simple. We seek in this conference to raise up a mighty army. You are that army. Our desire is that you will fight manfully under Christ's banner "against sin, the world, and the devil". We desire that you should lead the church by faithfully following our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As Father Stockall said last night, participating in this conference is a great joy and privilege. It's funny when you think about it. We come to this conference each year and experience the same thing. We get little sleep, no privacy, and most staff members go home with a cold. Strong coffee and great food keep me going all week. By the end of the conference all of the Staff members are utterly exhausted. What's so strange about-all this is that the St. Michael's Conference is the high point of our year. You are the reason that this is so.' We thank you for allowing us to teach the various courses offered this year. We thank you for your interest and participation. When we looked up at last night's pageant at the the various representations of God's grace as it is received in the sacraments and rites of the church and saw you performing .these holy functions, our purpose here was made crystal clear. You are members of a royal army and a holy family owhich the Lord himself has created. This conference is dedicated to helping you live in a manner which befits who you truly are. You are rich beyond measure. You are fabulously wealthy. You are inheritors of a royal kingdom. You must simply learn to recognize your own blessings.

Imagine that a great and beautiful object was given to you. Let's say that this object was of fantastic value, a pearl for example. This is no ordinary pearl, it is both very large, the size of a softball, and very pure. Owning this pearl makes you incredibly wealthy. Now imagine that you have no idea what this priceless pearl is. Having the pearl makes you rich beyond your wildest dreams. This pearl could change your life and the lives of those you love, but you have no idea of its value. Perhaps you keep it on your bookshelf beside the dictionary where it props up a few old dusty volumes of ancient history. Maybe you use it to keep the door of your room from closing completely thus making the room too dark for comfort. It could be that you use the pearl to prop the window open to let in a little fresh air.

Then you meet people like us. We say to you: "Don't you know what you have? You have a pearl of great price. You're rich! This pearl can change your life and the lives of others whom you bless with your wealth."

You say to us: "What, that old thing? I've had it for about as long as I can remember. I guess it is sort of pretty.

And we say: "Pretty?!" "That pearl is precious and by possessing it, you are rich beyond measure."

And you say: "Yeah, sure!"

We have at this conference attempted to make you mindful of your wealth. God, the creator of heaven and earth, is your spiritual Father. God loves you so much that he becomes bone of your bones and flesh of your flesh as God the Son takes our human nature upon himself. God the Father sees his Son in you and you in his Son. He loves you with a love greater than any created thing. The Lord through whom all things were made has laid down his life for you in complete love. You may be forgiven every sin and you may live as God's own child by adoption and grace. God has put his own spirit within you so that you may be fully and truly a member of the family. You have been given eternal life. God invites you to know him in faith. The Lord has made you a solemn promise that he will never leave or forsake you. He loves you with a love that will never let you go. The most joyful moment and the happiest time that you can recall are but

a faint shadow, a thin taste, a brief glimpse, of the real, complete, perfect, and eternal joy which the Lord himself will give you.

One of the problems with us is that we cannot properly imagine receiving such a great gift. I can imagine someone giving me a hundred dollars. I would deeply appreciate the gift and find words adequate to thanking such generosity. I cannot, however, imagine someone giving me a million dollars. I would not know what to say or how to respond. I'd be at a total loss. The Psalm writer seems to be thinking along these lines when he writes: "What shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that he has done unto me?" That is a very good question. How can we truly thank God? What words are adequate, what response is appropriate for thanking God for what is great beyond all imagining. Only one response is really possible and the Psalmist answers his own question in the next verse. "I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord."

Imagine that you are the child of a great king. The whole kingdom is yours. You are happy and at home in this kingdom until a strange thing happens. You are somehow lost and you find yourself in a strange land. Also, your memory is lost and you cannot recall anything about your real home. You don't feel truly at home and comfortable in this strange land, but it's the only home you know.

You hear stories. These stories greatly interest you because they are about a great kingdom. Although this kingdom sounds unbelievable and hard to imagine you somehow feel drawn to it. You set out to find this kingdom. The more you learn about the place, the more familiar it seems to you. As you draw closer to the kingdom your memory slowly begins to return. Gradually you remember who you truly are. You remember that this great kingdom is your real home. You finally arrive and are greeted by your father-the King. It's all clear now. You remember all. You know yourself even as you have been known by your father who welcomes you in his loving embrace.

This is our Christian journey. We journey to a kingdom to which we are heirs. We are pilgrims on our way "to a great city that has expected our return for years. Let us have the courage and the faith and the hope to make that journey.

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,  
guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
If I lacked anything.  
A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:  
Love said, you shall be he.  
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,  
I cannot look on thee.  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame  
Go where it doth deserve.  
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?  
My dear, then I will serve.  
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:  
So I did sit and eat. (George Herbert)

What shall we give unto the Lord for all that he has done unto us? Let us take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.

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