

1995: ST. MICHAEL'S CONFERENCE SERMON

**... for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do
always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.**

The text on which is based this morning's sermon came to me while I was wolfing down my ninth slice of Father Hawkins' excellent french toast, drinking my fifth cup of coffee, clearing the breakfast dishes, and jotting down notes for my second class. Somewhere in the midst of all this busyness and rushing about, I thought how much I would like at that moment to be an angel. How wonderful, how splendid it must be to behold the face of our heavenly Father in eternity. What perfect rest. What glorious peace and quiet, where everything that is not music is silence.

Alas, this is not where God has put me. I am not St. Michael nor was meant to be. We are not angels. We are not meant to be angels. Ours is a different and even greater destiny. If it was God's will that we be angels, then he would have created us as angels. And yet, this conference is named after St. Michael, the leader of the angels, because we are called to share in a glory which we shall know together with St. Michael and All Angels.

St. John, that great visionary, writing about this glory says:

We know not what we shall be, but we know
that we shall be like him, for we shall
see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

We are called to behold the Lord God for all eternity. We are called to be in God's presence for ever. "We shall see him as he is" and we shall we transformed by what we behold, in full knowledge and perfect love.

Well, that's heaven. This is earth. What are we to do in the meantime? Is this earthly home just some sort of waiting room in which we must put in time as we await heaven or may we somehow participate even now, if only in a partial way, in this glory that shall be? This conference is meant to provide us with an answer to this question.

God has given us ways in which we may behold him here and now. These are his gifts to us. We have spent this past week helping you discover these gifts and grow in them.

The greatest gift which the Lord God gives us is the gift of himself. The Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, shows us our own perfection. We must become like him. We may know what he is like by beholding him in his word written which we must "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest".

The underlying purpose of all the courses taught at this conference is to give you a solid grounding in the teachings of the Bible. We begin to know God in his word. We begin to see the face of God in his word. It is our prayer that each one of you might continue to read and study God's word and continue to spiritually grow. In fact, it has been a great blessing to see how many of you have done just that. You are a tremendous encouragement to us and we look forward to seeing you here next year at St. Michael's.

Another gift which the Lord gives us by which we may behold his face is the gift of ourselves. Each one of us is created in God's own image. The more we know God and the more we love God, the more we shall come to resemble him in knowledge and love. We must learn to see God's image in one another and to love God's image in one another. We are God's own children, adopted by grace. We are brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ and of one -another in him. We ought to learn to see and to love a family resemblance in one another.

This sense of the Christian family is something which we try to foster at these conferences. Please pray for each other and keep in touch with each other and support each other in the Christian faith from now on until we meet next year at St. Michael's.

Another gift by which we may seek the face of the Lord is in this and all acts of Christian worship. Spiritual worship, so essential to this conference, is the gift which brings us closest to beholding the Lord because it alone combines the first two gifts in a unique and wonderful way. Our worship is "thoroughly" shaped by and rooted in holy Scripture. Our worship is something we do together. Our prayer is common, uniting us as brothers and sisters around the Lord's banqueting table of love. In this and in every celebration of the holy Communion we participate in a limited way, in time, in the eternal worship of heaven where the angels do even now behold the face of the heavenly Father. The Prayer Book tells us that our worship unites us with the worship offered by "angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven".

The church is the "Body of Christ". Worship is the one activity which the whole body does together. We are joined by all the company of heaven. We worship with St. Paul who joins his voice with all those who at one time opposed the work of the church but are now members of Christ's body. We -worship with St. Peter who joins his voice with all those who once denied our Lord but who have since repented and been reconciled with God. St. Thomas the Apostle sings with all those who have doubted, or who perhaps still doubt what they cannot see and touch and taste. St. Mary Magdalene and St. Mark sing from that large section of the choir filled with those who having failed were given another chance. The Holy Innocents join with those whose infant voices cannot say what their hearts surely feel while all confessors and martyrs sing fully and forcefully to give us courage to carry on when our own voices are weak and unsure.

The great company of heaven is not complete without our patron. St. Michael and his angelic army fill heaven with angelic harmonies. They offer up unending praise as they behold clearly what is for us still partial, the loving face of our heavenly Father.

Let us give thanks for this conference. Let us give thanks for the Word of God and for one another. Let us give thanks for spiritual, heavenly worship in these lowly earthen vessels. Let us learn to long for the fulness of heaven, the beauty of holiness, and the glory of heavenly worship. Let us with prayerful and thankful hearts look forward to meeting here again next year at St. Michael's.

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