

1998: ST. MICHAEL'S CONFERENCE SERMON

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb"+

Life is a struggle and this is particularly the case in the life of our soul. There is an intellectual, moral and spiritual struggle in our hearts and minds. It is hard for us to learn, to do good, to pray and to worship.

There is a struggle because we have an enemy, and the enemy is not the slow driver who provokes our impatience, not the snoring cabin mate who keeps us up all night, not the moth whose flight distracts our prayers. Our real enemy is that Slanderer, our Adversary and Accuser, the Devil. He it is who would keep us from God, from the knowledge and love of God, that we might be lost in darkness and despair.

The Communion of Saints

In our struggles as Christians we have many comforts. One such comfort is the fellowship of believers. Often we feel all alone, and this is especially true of young believers like you. Remember when Elijah fled in fear from that terrible woman Jezebel, he exaggerated his troubles and claimed to God, "I, even I only, am left" . But the Lord reminded Elijah, "I have left seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him". This Saint Michael's Conference, as every one, is a reminder from God for all of us of the real fellowship we have together with the remnant of those who believe in Jesus Christ. I hope that you draw courage and comfort from the Communion of Saints, and from this small part and expression of that Communion.

The Ministry of Angels

Another such comfort is the presences, fellowship and even aid of God's holy angels.

1. The angels are messengers. They bring the good news of Jesus' birth and resurrection to us. We hope that you have learned something of that message, of the Word of Life, in your Bible classes this week.

2. The angels behold the face of the Father in heaven, and that too is our goal, to find our fulfillment in that face to face knowledge of God. Our classes in Theology have been intended to help you grow toward that happy knowledge.

3. The angels tell us quite simply, as one told St. John, "Worship God"! So this week we have tried to grow in the understanding and practice of that worship.

4. And Jesus tells us, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth". That is, the angels cheer, even louder than we did when Josh conquered the Kamikaze, the angels cheer our moral victories, when we avoid or turn from sin.

In your struggles, and especially I would say in those spiritual and moral battles you face daily, may the fellowship and aid of God's angels, and of your own Guardian encourage and strengthen you. Elisha prayed this morning for his panicked servant that he might see the countless host of angels on his side. May God likewise open your eyes and mine that we may know and, 'fear not for they that be with us are more than they that be with them'.

If you are to be a Christian and to follow Jesus, if you are not to fall prey to the Devil's many traps and manifold temptations, if you are not to become another casualty of the world, the flesh, and the devil, then you will need the fellowship of Christians and the ministry of God's angels. And that fellowship is in Jesus, and that ministry of angels is through Jesus, the rescue ladder let down from heaven.

Blood of the Lamb

You see, the Devil wants you to give up. He would move us to despair. "Curse God and die", he says. He wants you to give up the faith, to give up moral and spiritual and intellectual struggle, to say it's too hard, it's too confusing, it's boring, it's no fun. Well, what final resource do we have against the dark doubts that would swallow us up. They overcame his attacks and accusations and lies by the blood of the Lamb. Jesus tells us not to be afraid because by his death and resurrection he has overcome the world. By faith we share in that victory, by faith we receive Christ's victory over sin and death in forgiveness and eternal life. We too can overcome by the blood of the Lamb. It is by the blood of the Lamb, by the willing and

innocent death of Jesus the Son of God, that we have come to know and believe the love that God hath to us. In the blood of the Lamb, we know nothing can separate us from the love of God. In this, the body of Jesus given for me, the blood of Jesus shed for me, I know by faith a victory over all my enemies, despair, discouragement, self-loathing, self-destructiveness, self-pity, hatred, lies, ignorance, and the last enemy – death. And that victory is offered to all of us, in the blood of the Lamb – in this Holy Sacrament – that we might be more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Come, taste and see how gracious the Lord is!

The Rev'd Michael Hawkins