

1999: ST. MICHAEL'S YOUTH CONFERENCE SERMON

“And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” (Rev 12:11)

In this conference, we learn of love, witness, and faith

I am a Star Wars fan. I saw the original 3 movies far too many times, and spent far too much money on Star Wars junk, all of which – if I had collected it, instead of playing with it – would be worth countless piles of money. Then came the Phantom Menace, the latest installment in the Star Wars cosmic battle.

It has moments, but the heroes in the new movie mostly bugged me, and didn't always seem very good, and the bad guys were kind of goofy, though Darth Maul looked mean, anyway.

Well, here we are. St Michael's 1999. No multi-million dollar special effects here. The week is all but done, faith learned, God's Word studied, our souls considered, prayers said, fund had, questions raised, new friends made, another special time together in our Christian pilgrimage coming to a close. Some of you are here again, and some for the first time.

And yet - this is all part of the real cosmic battle, of which Star Wars and any adventure movies is only a poor copy; in this battle in heaven and earth, of good and evil, the heroes are not over-paid actors and actresses who are always important and well-known characters in the story; those who are enemies of the kingdom of God don't always have scowls, horns, face tattoos, really bad teeth, and a light-saber. And unlike a battle in a movie, the battle in which we are engaged is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, and real spiritual wickedness in the devil and all his angels, who are far scarier than the Blair Witch Project or any horror movie could ever be.

We ask God to help us to be the real-life heroes in this universal battle, and the fact we are young, or aren't famous or well-known doesn't mean we don't matter.

This of other warriors in our battle: young Miriam or Mary of Nazareth, but a teenager when she said yes to God an salvation, in bearing God's Son, born for us; youthful John of Galilee, who became an evangelist, bishop, and faithful witness to Jesus the Lord; or St. Mark, young scribe to St. Peter, and author of a gospel; university-aged St. Stephen, first martyr for the faith, stoned to death by the enemies of the Kingdom; young men and women down the ages, in the Bible and the history of the Church, who lived and died with integrity, love, courage, faith, and a witness to their Lord in their day and age. And their story is your story, and my story, for it is God's story.

And in this, as a past pillar of St. Michael's youth conference, Fr. Dale Petley has put it, you younger Michaelites inspire us, your instructors and counselors; you refresh us with your questions and energy; you give us hope as we seek to hand on the good things of the faith once delivered to the saints; you give us Christian friendship, even as we seek to give you leadership, the courses we have prepared, the hard work and prayer that goes into making each St. Michael's Conference a memorable and positive experience. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

We hope that you have found this conference spiritually fruitful, giving weapons for the fight, strength for the battle, courage for the trials of life, as you seek to live and grow in Jesus.

For the reading from the Book of Revelation – Fr. Stockall may have me teach that course next year – in our reading we see the three things by which the saints of God overcome the powers of darkness, and have victory.

First, the saints overcame by the blood of the Lamb – that full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice once offered, in which we share every time we come to worship, and especially communion, and in which we are strong every time we repent and resolve to do better next time around, the Lord being our helper, the angels being our unseen helpers.

Second, the saint conquered by the word of testimony – by learning about Jesus as we have done here at St. Mike's, and by sharing that faith – in a gentle, smart, respectful way – with other people around us, as opportunity presents itself. Be renewed in your minds. Dare to see things as God sees them.

Finally, the saints have victory because they have someone and something to die for: Jesus Christ. Right now, around the world, in places in the Middle East, China, Asia, Africa, people are in prison, or dying, or being hurt because they love Jesus. We may never have to face that choice of life and death, but we may be made fun of, or ignored, or be treated like a loser or idiot because we believe in God, and because we are trying to live a different kind of life because of that belief.

But if we love, and have patience, and say our prayers, and keep the faith, our faith and God's Word show and help us to see that we can make a difference, and that nothing – not rejection or even death – can take Jesus from us, or take us from the hands of Jesus.

And so for the blessing of this week, and asking grace in days to come, let us all, as members of this conference, together with St. Michael the archangel, the angels, saints and all the hosts of heaven, given honour and glory unto God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. AMEN.

The Rev'd Sean A. Taylor