

2002: ST MICHAEL'S YOUTH CONFERENCE SERMON

"NOW WAR AROSE IN HEAVEN, MICHAEL AND HIS ANGELS FIGHTING AGAINST THE DRAGON; AND THE DRAGON AND HIS ANGELS FOUGHT, BUT THEY WERE DEFEATED." (Rev 12:7-9)

In Christ, we have the victory.

Sleepless, happy, heads full of mush and new thoughts, knees sore from prayer together, the ever-happy shine from Fr. Stockall's head, and the requisite water-fight, and Fr. Laskey is almost done the research for his courses this year - but still, here we are near the end of another St. Michael's Youth Conference.

I've been coming here for ten years or so, and every year the interesting thing is that I find the instructors and counsellors are as blessed and enriched and uplifted as most of the Michaelites are. On behalf of the leaders, thank you for your time, your friendship, your questions, and your prayers. Through you, God has given us gifts, too.

This is a holy time apart, devoted to Christian friendship, attention to God, and refreshment. And soon, back to the fray - to school, work, home - but hopefully, not quite as we were before. We have been Christians together here, Christians alive - having a foretaste of the fellowship, the serious joy, the blessings of heaven, our eternal home.

But not yet. Here below we still have the journey, the battle, the faith, hope and love which is our calling whether we have many or few years before us. We have our blessings and our burdens, and our particular callings as soldiers and servants of the Lord.

We are also reminded in the readings for this Holy Communion that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses - the holy angels, who according to the will of almighty God, surround, guide, protect, and battle beside us. St. Michael and all the angels - as close to us as the love of God.

Blessed Michael and his angels battle the devil and his greasy crew, and bounce them out of heaven, and defend us from them, too. As we look at the battles of our hearts, or the conflicts in the world, we are not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good; our war is not just against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness, too.

When I was a teen, I loved the *Lord of the Rings* books, and only dreamed of a time when decent movies like the recent ones might be made. The drama, the clarity, the courage, the serious and costly battle to preserve goodness and so on - yet we are in a battle far more important and real than that - against sin, death, and hell, and souls hang in the balance. Each Christian - young or old - has an important part to play, in God's will and good purpose: for now, and for all who come after us until the end of all things. You are all in the real adventure.

For our Lord Jesus Christ has won the victory ahead - on the cross, his cleansing blood washes our sins away; rising from the broken tomb, he opens up the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Here today, at this simple altar, we are really and spiritually going up to heaven, to the throne of the heavenly grace - we kneel even now with the shepherds at the manger; we truly stand at the foot of the Cross, we stand in the garden and hear the greeting of the risen Jesus.

But soon home. May this Conference be a spark, a spring-board, a clarification of our calling and our gifts and our high destiny to be walking icons, images of Christ, as St. Paul says: **"we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."** (2 Cor. 3:18)

Love God and neighbour; keep the faith; let nobody despise you for your youth, or the holy name of Christian; never trade eternity for passing trinkets; keep learning and praying, so you can give a reason for the faith that is in you; ask God to make you a saint. And come back next year.

So come, and be fed by the bread of eternal life, and the cup of everlasting salvation, and may it be a seal and foretaste of the better and heavenly St. Michael's Youth Conference with St. Michael and all angels and all the saints and faithful company of heaven, shining eternally in the uncreated light of God's blessed face;

even God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,
now and ever and unto ages of ages, AMEN.

The Rev'd Sean. A. Taylor