

## 2008: ST. MICHAEL'S CONFERENCE SERMON

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Soon, in a couple of hours, we will be in our vehicles and on our way home. And when you get there, what will be waiting for you, and who? Some messages on Facebook, and on the telephone; a pile of clothes on your bed; a saved file on your computer game? What else? A list of things you have to get for school; maybe your work schedule for next week. And who – who will be waiting for you? Your dog or cat? A friend? Your parents? Maybe your grandmother or grandfather? Anyone else? Your Church, hopefully. Whatever and whoever, the point is, **life** awaits. **Your** life, in **your** home town, with **your** friends; this is what awaits you. But that's not all. There are other things: there are decisions to be made – easy ones and hard ones too. There are responsibilities and duties to be fulfilled – some fun, and some quite unpleasant. And something we haven't had much of here this week will be waiting: alone-time. As teenagers and young adults, you have been given more and more of this alone-time, or freedom. It used to be, not so long ago, that you had to go with your mother when she went to get her hair done. You had to go with her and sit in the waiting area and look at the fashion magazines, breathing in the fumes from the low-hanging cloud of hair spray. But no more. "I'm going out to the hairdresser's", your mother says now. "I won't be too long. There is some left over chicken in the fridge. Don't answer the door, and don't watch anything that is not good on T.V. Love you!" And, off she goes. So we are heading home to our busy lives, to lots of alone-time, and to the freedom it brings.

Sounds excellent! Yahoo! But wait – we all know that with this freedom there is not automatic fun and happiness. Just because we have our independence does not mean that life will be a bowl of cherries. In fact, if anything, with freedom comes responsibility. Think about it: when you were little, your parents made your choices for you: they laid out your clothes; they told you what to eat and when to take a bath; and what you could watch. They went to Blockbusters with you and made you pick out an 'E' rated movie. Likewise, your teachers gave you strict rules as to what was expected of you; and your priest told you what is true and right and holy and all that a Christian ought to believe and do. It was simple – all you had to do was follow along; all you had to do was sit down in your little rubber tube and let the current carry you along. But now it is for you to decide if you will use the tube and if you will follow the current in God's river. On the one side, as we saw in last evening's Pageant, there are the forces of Almighty God and all that is good – your parents and grandparents, and Godparents; your priest; your Church; the faithful departed; St. Michael and all the angels, and the whole company of Heaven. On the other side, there are the powers of Satan and all that is evil – the sinful lusts of the flesh; the selfish desires and greed within us; and outside us, the vanities of the world. These things attempt to lure us away from the Light of our childhood confidence in God's grace into the deep darkness of doubt and fear. For example, think how often the desire for pleasure comes to us. Like a demon, it comes and makes a pitch to our feelings and emotions. "You need a little pick me up," it whispers. You had better try this. "You're feeling lonesome", or "Hey! You're feeling strong" – why not do this? It happened to Samson. It happened to St. Anthony and to St. Bernard of Clairvaux. It happened to St. Peter and the rest of the Apostles; and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and even to the Lord Jesus Himself. As St. Matthew tells us, *"Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."* (4.1)

That is something we all need to remember: that our Saviour knows about temptation. He understands the struggles that go on in our minds when we are trying to do the right thing. He understands, because, He was tempted Himself for forty days and night; and yet He did not give in. And also in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night before His Crucifixion, the Lord was tempted. Do you remember how His *"sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground"*? (St. Luke 22.44) And, how He prayed, *"Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not my will but Thine be done."* (St. Luke 22:42) There Jesus was, facing terrible pain and suffering and death for us. Absolutely He was tempted to run and save Himself. But instead he prayed, *"Not my will but Thine be done."* He prayed, and He stayed, and He went to the Cross for us. So, remember dear friends, your Saviour understands what you go through when you're tempted. Reach out to Him, then. He is as close as your breath; and He will be your Strong Helper. He has thousands of angels to send to your aid, and one in particular (as this

morning's Gospel tells us) who is your guardian angel. *"Seek ye the Lord" then "while He may be found, (and) call ye upon Him while He is near..."*. (Isaiah 55:6)

As we face these temptations in the land of our independence and freedom, it is important to be realistic about what victory will look like. Don't think for a minute that because you remain faithful to God and resist the devil that everything will be fine. The sun might shine afterwards and it might not. Your friends may stand with you, but actually its very likely you will find out who your real friends are. The Gospel tells us that on the night of our Lord's betrayal, his disciples *"all forsook Him and fled."* (St. mark 14:50) Instead of the enemy leaving Him when He stayed true to God's will, it actually increased and got the upper hand, and Jesus was brutally killed on the Cross. And that will undoubtedly happen to us when we resist the feelings and pleasures and vanities of the flesh and of this world. There will be a time of suffering; and in a certain way of speaking, there will be death.

But that is not the end! Being a follower of Jesus Christ and resisting temptation is not ultimately about death – it is about abundant life! It is not all about sadness – it is about great joy – everlasting joy, and peace and true happiness. It is not about a grim and awful life of rules and regulations; rather, it is about faith, hope and charity. How?

Because of the Resurrection! **Christ has died. Christ is risen! Christ will come again!** These are the glad tidings of the Christian Faith; and this is the foundation on which to build your life. Set your freedom on the Cornerstone Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. Ask Him to direct your paths. Don't lean on your own understanding; and don't seek the wisdom of the world. All that is true and good and holy; all that is lasting and really of Love is found in Jesus – in the only begotten Son of God Who shed His precious Blood on the Cross for us. In Him alone we shall find that peace and happiness our hearts desire. For only by Him are the powers of sin and death and hell defeated. Isn't that what we saw last night? St. Michael's victory over Satan was supplied by Christ. St. Michael and his angels overcame the great dragon by the **Blood of the Lamb**; and "now is come to us salvation, and power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ." Listen to that again – what more could we possibly want? "Now is come to us salvation, and power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ." This, you see, tells of our true freedom, our true freedom and eternal happiness in Christ. You see, for the Christian, freedom is not doing what you feel like whenever you like. No. For the Christian, for the one who follows Jesus Christ, true freedom is being free from sin's power to do what is good and right and holy according to God's perfect will. And, without Christ and His Sacrifice on the Cross that freedom is not possible. Without the Blood of the Lamb, St. Michael and his angels could never have beat the dragon.

As we go home from this place, think about Samson – think about how the Lord wants you to be strong and free to love Him and to do His will. This is never easy, but by the Blood of Christ it is possible. So don't give up! And, don't be afraid, *"for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."*(2 Kings 6:16) Remember that the Holy Spirit, your Counsellor, lives in you. Remember the patience and forgiveness of God. Remember St. Michael, and your guardian angel, and all the Heavenly Host who stand by to help you. And remember the Lord Jesus Who has purchased your freedom with His precious Blood. As you heard last night:

***"Stand along with Him – stand along with Jesus and be free."***

Fr. Chris VanBuskirk