

## 2010 ST MICHAEL'S YOUTH CONFERENCE SERMON

Revelation 12:7-11 | St. Matthew 18:1-10

*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony...*  
Revelation 12:11

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If you are one of the many who like war games or Xbox, or things like that, then at first glance, St. Michael's might seem just the right kind of place for you!

Think of the passages from Holy Scripture that we have heard this week.

Wednesday morning we heard the prophet Elisha foretell the day that Hazael of Syria would set on fire [the fortresses of Israel], and ... slay their young men with the sword, and dash in pieces their little ones, and rip up their pregnant women. 1 Kings 8:12b

And were that not gruesome enough, we heard on Thursday of how Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat killed King Joram with an arrow between his shoulders that pierced through to his heart; and shortly afterwards called for the murder of wicked Queen Jezebel, whose blood, as we were reminded, was spattered on the walls and horses when she was thrown down from a high window. 2 Kings 9:33

And in the evening of that same day, we heard of how Queen Athaliah destroyed the royal family; and for her efforts was herself arrested in the House of the Lord and was put to death by sword.

And even on this quiet morning, we heard, once again, of war, this time in heaven: Michael and his angels fighting the dragon and his angels; who were, as we saw so powerfully in last night's pageant, thrown down and cast out forever.

And we have to admit that the images that we read and heard and thought about this past week are not so different from the images that we see all around us: violence is part of life in so many different forms; but one of the most powerful forms has nothing to do with swords or spears or even lasers; one of the most powerful forms, one of the most powerful weapons, are words; words spoken in anger or in ridicule.

In her book *Bird by Bird: Instructions on Writing and Life*<sup>[1]</sup>, Ann Lamott remembers how important having the "right" kind of lunch could be in school. She writes:

it only looked like a bunch of kids eating lunch...  
[but] the contents of your lunch  
said whether or not you and your family were Okay.  
Some bag lunches, like some people, were Okay, and some weren't.  
There was a code, a right and acceptable way...  
[If] your friends saw a big leaf of romaine [lettuce]  
falling out along with the slice of bologna,  
you might soon find yourself [standing]  
alongside that kid against the fence.  
[And] There always was that one kid against the  
fence.  
How could the rest of us feel okay if there wasn't?  
If it was a guy, there was probably a trumpet case at his feet...  
He didn't end up [against the fence]  
only because his lunches were nightmarish in their eccentricity,  
but his lunches didn't help...

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<sup>[1]</sup> Pantheon Books, 1994.

Now, maybe you've been the target of some of those words spoken in ridicule or anger; or maybe you've seen others hurt in this way, or you've shared in some small way with their tormentors; or maybe you've been tempted to make compromises to avoid the taunting or the bullying or the persecution; tempted to surrender your integrity or your character to serve someone else's agenda; to avoid their anger or rejection; to escape the words that wound and hurt; maybe even compromising yourself and what you know is right to win a little security or acceptance or a pale, distorted, imitation of love.

This whole conference serves to remind us of what, deep down, we all know: that life is a struggle; not a battle with swords or arrows or lasers or whatever, but a battle for our minds and our hearts; a battle for our souls.

But this conference also serves to remind us that in this struggle we are not ever truly alone, as much as we may feel at times that we are. This conference hopefully serves to remind us that, by Grace, we are part of something beyond our imagination: a Body of which Christ is the Head, of which we are members; a Body created and filled by God's Presence, by God the Holy Spirit; a Body with Michael the Archangel, and all the Holy Angels, as our guardians and protectors against all our spiritual enemies; a Body made up of countless saints who, like all the staff and conferees at this conference, are your friends and fellow witnesses.

And just as the lying, deceptive, words of Satan are a powerful weapon spoken against us, words, true words, are the most powerful weapon that we have: not our words, but God's Word, which has and who has been such a central part of all that we have done together here this week.

The words we speak are not words spoken in anger or ridicule or rejection but words spoken in patience and compassion and love; they are words spoken in Christ's Name and with Christ's commission; words spoken not to tear down but to build up; words that heal.

It is that Word, that life-giving Word, that we have spent so much time with this week; and we have done so with the hope that as we return later this day to our families and our homes, and soon to our friends and schools and jobs, we might do so with a whole new set of weapons; weapons that will help us make better choices and wiser decisions; weapons that will help all of us to make a difference in our families and in our schools and in our parish churches, so that St. Michael's will not be just a week-long event but a year-long process; a process in which, together, we grow into the image of Christ, the image planted within us at creation and renewed in our baptism.

On our own we are helpless; we are not able to conquer in this battle, but Christ is, and has. And in love He has left for us this sacrament, that we might be nourished and nurtured for this battle and this journey. In Christ's Body and Blood given for us, we share in a victory over all of our enemies, over despair and discouragement, over self-pity and destructiveness, over hatred and lies, and even over death. And that victory is offered to all of us in the blood of the Lamb.

So come now that you might be fed; come now that our friendship with Christ and our friendship with each other in Christ might be nurtured and nourished and sustained; come now, that we might together be the children of God – honoured, respected, and dearly loved by the Christ who lived and died and rose for us and on our behalf.

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