

St Michael's Youth Conference, 2011  
Votive of St Michael & All Angels

From the Book of the Revelation to St John,  
There was war in heaven.

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

A few years ago Fr Michael Hawkins asked a class of first-year conferees, 'What do you think the Devil wants for you.' I thought to myself, 'Oh brother. Where is this going?!' But his answer surprised and delighted me, and it has stayed with me ever since. 'He wants you to despair,' he said, 'He wants you to give up.' And this is true. Our spiritual enemies seek to undermine our confidence in God's goodness and mercy. 'You are alone!' they say. 'There is no one looking out for you. You must grab what you can when you can - on your own terms, on your own time, as you see fit. Its everyone for himself. You cannot afford to love God or your neighbour. You are foolish to look for something more and better than a life of self-indulgence.' The destruction of our souls begins as our confidence in God's goodness and mercy is undermined. It is checked as the memory of the goodness, mercy and power he has made known in Jesus Christ is renewed. Through Christ we know that He is good and that he loves mankind. And each of us can look back to our Baptism and recall that this same goodness, mercy, and power has reached out to us to make us God's own children by adoption and grace. You may remember that we are warned about the great spiritual struggle to come at our Baptism. We are enlisted to join the army Christ, 'to fight manfully under his banner against the world, the flesh, and the devil.' And what is that struggle? It is a struggle against despair. It is a struggle against all that would keep the good seed of hope that was planted in us at our Baptism from growing.

We all know what happens when we are in the grip of despondency and despair. We do anything to forget our misery. And later we withdraw - we shut ourselves off from the world. In effect, we say, 'leave me alone.' So Adam and Eve in the Garden, after they have allowed the serpent to undermine their confidence in God's goodness and mercy, disobey and take the forbidden fruit. For the first time they are ashamed, and hide from one another. When God comes to them, they run. And that has been the human race ever since: hiding from one another, running from God. Not able to believe that any good could come of it if we stopped all this running and hiding and stood before God and one another in all honesty, humility and trust, we seek to be alone in so many, many ways, even when we live busy lives surrounded by other people.

Despair is the death of desire. And as I said earlier this week, our life together in Christ is about purifying, lifting up, and strengthening desire. And so in the Church God has given us the means to purify, elevate and renew desire. This is wonderfully placed before us in the Holy Communion service. At the beginning, we are isolated and without direction, lost. The priest alone stands facing East, expectant and waiting, and claims for all those present the relationship that God has established with us in our Baptism. 'Our Father...' he says, recalling us to the first words that we said or that our fellow Christians said for us at our Baptism. Then we acknowledge that God knows our desires - the deepest, darkest secrets of our hearts - and yet loves us. We stop hiding and running as the priest addresses the God 'unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid' and ask for his help to cleanse our desires and renew

our hope: 'cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name...' We were made 'to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever' as one old catechism puts it. And here we begin to dare to hope again - to hope as children and heirs of the true and living God. Then we cry out for mercy, 'Lord, have mercy upon us.' Our minds and hearts are 'collected' to God in the 'collect', and we are prepared to hear the eternal Word of God speak in the words of Holy Scripture. Here messengers from the heavenly courts bring us news of our homeland of the human mind and heart and of the power that will sustain us on the way. We reply first by confessing our faith in the words of the Creed, by listening with a renewed power of attention to the Scriptures with the help of the preacher, and then by turning to God in love in the offertory and to the world in the intercessions and prayers for all people and the whole Church. Love and repentance - turning to God - go hand in hand. Our knowledge of our true situation deepened, we turn to him in a new and deeper way, confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness. We are ready then to 'lift up our hearts' and find ourselves in the company of Christ together with 'angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven'. Then we receive 'the Bread of angels' - the Word of God - but not as the angels do. The Word of God did not become an angel. He became Man. He took our human nature upon him, to live our life and die our death, and rise triumphant over everything that keeps us from communion and fellowship with Him and with one another. We receive the Bread of Angels as no angel ever could, for we receive the Word made flesh. And then we ALL say the Lord's Prayer together. We have been brought out of isolation into communion. Together we give thanks. And together we join in the great hymn of praise, 'Glory be to God on high', and receive God's blessing.

As you leave this conference, you will often be tempted to believe 'you are alone, you must look out for yourself, you cannot afford to love God or other people.' May you find in your Parishes and families all the good things God has left us that desire, life, love may not die in us, but live: purified, lifted up, strengthened, carrying us upwards and inwards deeper into the life of God the Holy Trinity, and so deeper into friendship and communion through Christ with all the saints and with one another.

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

Isolation, w/o direction. Reality TV. Soap opera.  
Priest alone, facing East, expectant. Lord's prayer.  
Collect for purity.  
Listen. Messengers.  
Faith, confidence, remember.  
Love - intercede, pray with Christ and the whole Church.

Called yet higher. Receive light => union.  
Confess, absolved.  
'Lift up your hearts'  
Sanctus  
Receive 'the Bread of angels' - but not as the angels do  
Gloria

1. Elisha. Not alone. 'A great company of witnesses'  
Belong to Christ, who has won the war.

1. What can this warfare be about?

Angels?  
Warfare?

2. How does this warfare come to our attention?

In the Bible. Serpent.  
In our experience.

Families. Nations. The news. Human history. Our own lives.  
Our own minds & hearts.

3. What do we as human beings stand to lose?

Fr (now Bishop) Hawkin. Despair. Give up.  
The death of desire - of love. Quinquagesima.

No ascent. No way home. Endless, pointless turmoil. Soap opera / 'Reality' TV  
Isolation.

Death - first of the soul (i.e., of love & knowledge), then of the body.

4. What prevents our ascent? What kills love?  
What brings love to life?

5. Messengers. Look upward towards God, downward to the rest of Creation.

'These things angels long to look into.' Messengers of Christ.

Ascent.  
Home.  
Power.

Good, Beautiful, True - and the Author of all that is good, beautiful and true.

6. Angels in the liturgy.

Isolation, without direction - stand in hope, looking East expectantly.

Listen. Messengers sent to lift us up.

Drawn out of ourselves to stand with and in Christ, interceding for the whole world.

'Lift up your hearts.' Desire - ascend, purify, strengthen.

Sanctus.

Receive 'the Bread of angels' - the Word of God: but not as the angels do.

Gloria in excelsis. No longer alone.

7. Elisha and his servant. This is what the liturgy does for us, if we will let it.

From the Eighty-Ninth Psalm (vv. 6-8, *BCP*, p. 443),

For who is he in the skies that shall be compared unto the Lord?

And what is he among the gods that shall be like unto the LORD?

God is very greatly to be had in reverence in the council of the of the holy ones,

and to be had in reverence above all them that are round about him.

O Lord God of hosts, who is like unto thee?

Thy faithfulness, most mighty Lord, is on every side.