

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

There is a lot of convergence between last Sunday's Gospel from Mark 9 and this week's festival Gospel from Matthew. And actually, if we weren't celebrating St. Michael and All Angels today, we would have continued on in Mark's Gospel, and we would have found more convergence. In these texts, we have the disciples talking about worldly greatness; in these texts, we have Jesus calling a child unto Himself and using that child and his humility as an example of greatness in the kingdom of heaven; in these texts, Jesus warns of a punishment worse than having a great millstone hung around your neck and being drown in the sea for causing such a child "*who believes in [Him] to sin*"; in these texts, Jesus talks about cutting off or plucking out anything that causes oneself to stumble.

Now in Mark, Jesus talks about being salt in the world—Jesus may have used this figure more than once, for Matthew and Luke have this figure elsewhere. But then finally, in Matthew alone, Jesus says, "*See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.*" What a warning to the disciples; Jesus loves the little ones so much that He has given them angels to watch over them, and their angels are always before the Father — not that the disciples would get the message completely, for only one chapter ahead, we see the disciples trying to prevent parents from bringing their children to Jesus to let Him "*lay his hands on them and pray.*" Here again Jesus corrected the disciples' faulty understanding: "*Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them,*" He said, "*for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 19:14).

Still, that's not much to go on regarding angels and archangels and all the company of heaven on this St. Michael and All Angels festival. We did pray acknowledging that God "ordained and constituted the service of angels and men in a wonderful order". Angels are creatures just like we are, although they are not enumerated in the creation account in Genesis. It seems as if they were created early, for the Lord intimates that these "*sons of God*" were there shouting for joy when He "*laid the foundation of the earth,*" and "*determined its measurements.*" These "*morning stars sang together*" as God sank "*[the earth's] bases*" and "*laid its cornerstone*" (Job 38:4-7).

The angels were created before man, created to "serve and worship [God] in heaven," appointed to "help and defend us here on earth." They are part of the "all things ... invisible" that God created (Nicene Creed); they are "*ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of*" us, that is, for the sake of "*those who are to inherit salvation*" (Heb. 1:14).

Angels are mighty and powerful — you don't want to mess with them. Not even Adam dared challenge the mighty cherubim with flaming swords guarding the way back into Eden, back to the tree of life. And the King of Syria and his army could not prevail against the angel host sent to protect Elisha and his servant (2 Kings 6).

Angels worship the Lord, ever singing His praise. The six-winged seraphim foremost are ever in the Lord's presence, singing His praises in the never ending hymn, "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*" (Isaiah 6:3). We join the angels and archangels in this heavenly song of our Triune God every time our Lord Jesus descends from on high to serve us at the Holy Communion. "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," we sing, that is, "Lord of angel hosts."

Angels are messengers, too, for that's what the word angel means. They serve God by attending to His Son and proclaiming Him. The angels were there as the Son of God went forth to war for us — as our God Himself descended from heaven to fight for us. They announced His coming to shepherds in the field keeping watch over their flocks: "*unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*" A host of them sang His praises: "*Glory to God in the highest*" (Luke 2:11, 14). Angels attended to Jesus' needs in His wilderness scrap with the devil (Mark 1:13), and as He prayed in the Garden for strength as His betrayal drew near (Luke 22:43). Angels reminded the women that Jesus is the crucified one, and yet that He had won the victory over sin and death by His resurrection— "*He is not here. He is risen*" (Mark 16:6). Angels assured the disciples that Jesus will come again in glory on the clouds, and we know that the angels and archangels, some shouting, some blowing the trumpet, will announce the return of the Son in glory on the last day.

And then, though we would have been assailed throughout our days by our ancient enemy, "*the great dragon ..., that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world,*" for he, too, is a mighty angel that has been cast down, and he in frenzied and urgent attacks seeks our demise for he knows his time is short, nevertheless, we know that we shall arise, and we shall be changed. Yes, we shall put on the immortal and the imperishable, and we shall receive the victory that has been won for us.

For although Jesus could have, He did not send an angel army to rescue Himself from cross and death (Matt. 26:53). Rather by His blood shed, Jesus crushed the head of the ancient serpent, and handed over a weapon to the angels whereby they too would defeat Satan and lead us in glorious triumph to heaven. For Jesus now sends them to fight for us, with that same blood, the blood of the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world, and with the word of their testimony.

Indeed, with Jesus' unseen angels at our side, arrayed in the full armor of God, wielding these same weapons, the blood of Jesus and the sword of the Spirit, we have conquered the devil. Jesus' victory is ours. *"Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come"* to us.

This is the good news even of this day speaking of angels. The Lord has *"has done a marvelous thing! [Jesus, the Lord's] right hand and his holy arm, have worked salvation for him."* We don't worship the angels, not even on this day, but we join with them in singing the new song to our Savior. *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"* *"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"*

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.