

Sermon for the Feast of St Michael and All Angels - Matthew 18:1-11

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

They're always around when something miraculous is about to happen. Angels, I mean. God's special messengers adorn the decisive moments in salvation history. The Angel Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." At the birth of the Lord, Angels sang praise of the incarnation: "Glory be to God on the high, and on earth peace, good will toward men." As the Lord prayed fervently on the Mount of Olives, where his sweat dropped like blood to the ground, an Angel from heaven appeared strengthening Him.

At the Resurrection, in the midst of a great earthquake, an Angel descended from heaven, rolled back the stone, and sat on it, in order to announce that the man who died is now alive. After forty days, Angels questioned the disciples at Jesus' ascension, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?" When St. Peter was imprisoned, an Angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought him out. Angels. They're always around when something miraculous is about to happen.

Angels make numerous appearances in the Holy Scriptures. But did you know that they dwell among us even today, even in this place? In our day there are many who believe that angels are not among the things that we should take seriously. Some may imagine angels to be like fairies or unicorns – just made up. But, in this place, we confess that angels are real.

Perhaps you didn't realize when you pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," you're asking that those living beings that surround God in heaven would also do their work on earth. Angels are the only beings that can go between heaven and earth. They do God's will in both places. They help you to speak of Christ. The words of our Lord: "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge him before the angels of God, but the one that denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God."

To acknowledge God before men is none other than to confess rightly who God is: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." Those things invisible are God's special helpers sent to mankind: angels. God's messengers lead heaven's choir, even as we sing, "The myriad angels raise their song; O saints sing with that happy throng! Lift up one voice; let heaven rejoice in our Redeemer's song!" Those invisible helpers will bring you to heaven, even as we sing: "Lord, let at last Thine angels come, to Abr'ham's bosom bear me home, that I may die unfearing."

The Gospel reading for St. Michael and All Angels' Day is a peculiar one. On the one hand, only once are angels mentioned in this account and then, only in reference to children. On the other hand, "children" or "little ones" are mentioned 6 times! The Lord teaches that children have a faith that you should emulate.

You would do well to note some significant things about a child-like faith. #1- Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child [in our midst] is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Children are humble. They are (in some cases) completely reliant on those who have authority over them. Mostly, children are not callused and bitter like adults tend to be, hardened by the cynical world. They can more easily turn or repent from sin.

#2- Jesus said, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me." Receiving the promises of God are much the same as receiving like a child. God's gifts have no strings attached, no expectations- they are completely free. A child knows that receiving gifts is good. They trust that there is no obligation to receiving presents. This is precisely the mind-set you should imitate when receiving the gifts of the Lord.

#3- Jesus said, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." Children are impressionable. For the better. For the worse. Children easily learn prayers and hymns by heart after just a few times of repetition. They learn to laugh and love from mom and dad. But they also learn to speak harsh words. They learn to slam doors. They learn to give the cold shoulder. Children aren't resilient. They're frail, no matter what the age. That's why the Lord said that it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea, than to cause one of these little ones to sin.

Humility: children exhibit it; angels marvel in it. Why else would the Lord say, "Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents?" Repentance and reliance on God's promises is the delight of angels.

They're always around when something miraculous is about to happen. Angels, I mean. And it's no different today. "Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify God's glorious name." Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper is nothing short of a miracle in our day. The Lord again dwells with man in the bread and in the cup. He is present in Body and Blood. Receive the Incarnate Word. Make the angels rejoice. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠