

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

It is the Disciple beloved of the Lord that recounts the great cosmic mystery to us, the mystery he saw by Divine revelation, the mystery that by the working of the Holy Spirit he makes known to you: there was a war in heaven.

A war in heaven. It is unthinkable, yet it is true. The very place we associate with holiness, peace, joy, bliss, light, happiness – that very place was torn by war. Indeed, it is a place of holiness, peace, joy, bliss, light, and happiness because of the salutary outcome of that war. St. John reports the battle. The Prophet Isaiah reports the rebellion.

For he who was once an angel of light said in his heart “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.” That is what the devil wanted – to be like God. So that is what he offered your first parents, the lie that brought their fall. But the truth is - no one is like unto God.

Michael, whose name means “Who is like unto God?” in Hebrew, Michael and His angels prevailed. The devil and his angels did not prevail. So the one once called “son of the morning” a created being, is cut down, the one who weakened the nations is conquered.

The dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail. So satan was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with Him. He could not attack the Creator. So he attacked the creation. He tried to add all men to his minions in their rebellion against God. The accuser of our brethren is the one that tempted the first man and woman, making them accusable. He lied. He twisted the Word of God and deceived them.

So while Michael and his angels prevailed, your first parents did not. They lost miserably. They bought the lie, so they were open to accusation. And the accuser did his work. So it is that the Apostle writes that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs until now.

You are, so to speak, the spoils of that war. And having inherited sin, you have offended God and neighbor. “For offenses must come”, the Lord Himself teaches, “but woe to that man by whom the offense comes.” That stern rebuke is a Divine Word that condemns every sinful man.

So as hard a teaching as it is to hear, it is better to enter into life maimed or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. It is better to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire. The Lord teaches “if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off... if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out...”

Because of the fall into sin, your members, your feet, hands, eyes, your mouth, are the tools by which sin is committed. But they are not the cause of sin. Sin comes from the fallen heart, and brings eyes and ears, mouth, hands and feet into the act. It is the heart that needs to be addressed, the heart that needs to be cut off, plucked out – which of course would be to die.

King David knew this well. So his prayer can be your prayer: “Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” In answer to your prayer, the God of Grace, the God of Love, the God of

Life, opens the Baptismal font to you. There you do die, as you are crucified with Christ and your sins are washed away. It is there that you are renewed, there that you rise to new life, as Christ's resurrection is made yours. It is there that you are converted, and given simple faith to become as the Lord teaches, like little children, trusting in God for all things.

It is there, in Holy Baptism, by the Spirit's power, that your heart is made new, so that your feet and hands, eyes, ears and mouth are made instruments of sanctification, your members now vehicles by which faith, childlike faith, confessed Christ, and does the very works that God has prepared beforehand, that you should walk in them.

And from whence does the font get its life-giving powers? From the Sinless One who bore your sin, and suffered His lifeless heart to be pierced by Roman sword point. The devil was cast down to earth. He deceived man. That man be saved, that you be saved, God took on Flesh and dwelt on earth. He entered the fray, to defeat sin, death and the devil for you. No one is like unto God but God alone. And God the Son, the crucified, risen and ascended Christ, is victorious. Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them!

The Prophet Isaiah records not only the rebellion, but also the sentence of the vanquished devil: "Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, And consider you, saying: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, Who shook kingdoms...?'" Christ is victorious, the devil is vanquished, and your Lord gives that Victory to you.

So rejoice, O Baptized! Rejoice, dear Christian, you to whom heaven is open in Christ! For now salvation, and strength, and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ has come. And you are added to His Kingdom, you are incorporated into His Victory, by the Blood of the Lamb, and by the life-giving Testimony of the Holy Gospel. And the image of God lost in the fall is restored in you, by the indwelling of His life-giving Spirit.

It is by His Blood and His Testimony that you too prevail in this earthly life, until you join the heavenly host, the angels and Archangels and martyrs and saints, around the throne of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.

The servant of the man of God, seeing the great army surrounding them, said "Alas... what shall we do?" So "Elisha prayed, and said "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. So it is in the Kingdom of God, and so it is for you, dear Christian. The heavenly angels are given to protect you too.

As the Apostle writes of the holy angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" God places around you a hedge of angels. And your angel too always sees the face of God the Father who is in heaven. So with confidence you can daily pray "...let Thy holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me."

Thanks be to God, the question that Michael's name asks is answered: no one is like unto God. In Him, the Victory is yours.

St. Matthew 18:1-10
The Feast of St. Michael, Archangel, 2019 A.✠ D.

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