

The Festival of St. Michael & All Angels
St. Matthew 18:1-10: "The Angels Humbly Serve Us at the Lord's Bidding."
September 28/29, 2019 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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SATURDAY: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray You to forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen. (Luther's Evening Prayer)

SUNDAY: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray You to protect me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen. (Luther's Morning Prayer)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" / And calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them and 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 is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. / "Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, but 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. / "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. / "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." ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whom the holy angels gladly serve and obey, dear fellow redeemed:

If you could be an angel for a day, how would you spend your time? I'm guessing you would want to fly around a bit, testing your wings, maybe visiting some interesting places around the world. Of course you would want to have a good look at heaven and take in all the sights and sounds. Maybe you would even go to a place of major conflict to work on putting a stop to the

fighting. You and I would want to do big things, things that were fulfilling to ourselves or helpful to a good many others.

But none of this describes the chief responsibilities of the holy angels. They are not interested in pursuing things that are personally fulfilling. They are content to take direction from God and carry out His will. They don't spend their time sight-seeing; they spend their time serving—including service to the least in the world. They are perfectly devoted to the Almighty God who gave them life.

They are exactly opposite from the fallen angels—the devil and his fellow demons. These fallen angels were proud. They did not want to serve at God's command. They did not want to worship Him alone. They wanted to be gods. They wanted all creation to bow to them. So they rebelled against their Creator. They led a revolt in heaven, which we heard about in today's Epistle lesson (Rev. 12:7-12). They lost this battle and were thrown out of heaven. But they still operate on earth.

How exactly do they pursue their wicked agendas on earth? When we compare our day with the New Testament, it seems like the demons were much more active back then. We don't observe obvious cases of demon-possession today like what we read about. But the demons haven't given up. They aren't taking a break. They are still active, most often in ways we don't perceive.

When we face situations where we are tempted to sin, there is no doubt the demons are involved in it. They want us to put our own desires first and to rebel against God like they did. You know how intense these temptations can be. You are tempted to do something that you know you should not do. You are tempted to look at something that is not for you to see. You are tempted to repeat something about someone else that you know is unverified or unkind. You are powerfully pulled in the direction of the sin. You try to resist, but the desire grows more and more intense.

The devil and demons put the thought into your head that carrying out the sin is the only way to resolve the desire. They try to convince you that you can stay in control of the sin. "No one will find out," you think. "It isn't really that bad. Everybody does it." But there is no excuse for sin. You and I do not have to sin. The demons cannot make us sin. They can only tempt us. The sin comes from our own hearts. Even those who are demon-possessed cannot say that the devil made them do bad things, because they are the ones who let the devil in in the first place.

Jesus warns us in today's text about temptations to sin. He says that temptations will come. The world is sinful, and we are sinners. All of us have fallen for temptations many times. But we must not become comfortable with sinning. We must not let down our guard. Getting comfortable with sin has led many children of God to abandon the faith. They choose the pleasures of the world over the promises of God's Word.

But Jesus says that it would be better to lose a hand or foot or eye in this life if they lead us to sin, than to enter hell with all members intact. We must fight these temptations to sin. And we stay vigilant and watchful not only about things that may tempt us, but also what may tempt those in our care.

This is particularly important for parents and grandparents to understand. Children are not aware of their vulnerability or of how hard the demons are working to destroy their faith. Children are trusting, and they may be tempted to trust the wrong people. They desperately want to be accepted and fit in, so they may spend time in bad company. It is a gross shirking of responsibility when parents or guardians let children decide who to hang out with or how to spend their time.

Besides peers who exert a bad influence on your kids, how else do you suppose the devil and demons try to tempt them? What would your children or grandchildren do every waking moment at home if you let them? That's right, they would use a smartphone or other digital device like it was glued to the palm of their hand. If you want to know where the demons are most active today—and not just against the youth—look no further than the endless temptations to sin online.

If you were a fish, you could find some good food on the internet, but you would also find millions of worms dangling off shiny, sharp hooks. Those are the temptations to sin. You can find pleasure online. You can find material to fuel your hatred, your worries, and your doubts. You can find distractions, which do not seem bad in and of themselves, but which keep you from your Christian callings. If you have spent any time online, you know this from personal experience. It is shocking how easy it is to find bad things you weren't even looking for in the first place.

But as active as the demons are in trying to destroy our faith, our reputation, and our very life, the holy angels are active too. If the holy angels were not fighting on our behalf, we would already be ruined. The devil and the demons would certainly overcome us.

This is clear from the account of Job. Job was a believer who was richly blessed by the LORD. When God and Satan conversed about Job, Satan said that Job had prospered only because the LORD had *"put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has,"* and *"blessed the work of his hands"* (Job 1:10). So the LORD gave Satan permission to attack everything Job had. In a matter of hours, all of Job's oxen, donkeys, sheep, and camels were either stolen away or destroyed, and his ten children died. That's how quickly the good things we have would be taken away from us if God did not send His angels to protect us.

It is a remarkable thing that the mighty angels so willingly serve us lowly sinners. It is not because they have decided we are worth the time and effort. It is because they honor God and want to obey His will. And it is God's will that these *"ministering spirits"* should serve *"those who are to inherit salvation"* (Heb. 1:14). The humble angels do just that. They encamp around those who fear Him (Psa. 34:7). They guard them in all their ways (Psa. 91:11). They turn back the constant assaults of the devil. They never grow tired of serving. They never take a break. They watch over us day and night.

Jesus says the angels are devoted to us because they are devoted to God. He says that the little children's angels *"always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."* This means that whatever the angels do for us, they do because God directs them to do it. Their protection of us is *His*

protection. Their care is *His* care. This is why we don't pray to the angels. They don't need or expect our thanks. All the glory is God's.

Some people think that their loved ones who die become angels and watch over them. But that is not the case. The souls of believers go straight to heaven. God does not send them to help their loved ones. He sends the holy angels. Like the angels who look to God, we should too, so that we are not led away from what the Lord says in His Word.

When we have ignored the Word and given into temptation, it is not because the angels failed to do their job. God chastens His children when they sin, so that they are humbled and return to Him. He may let the devil do some damage, so that we become aware of our pride and repent. And when we repent, Jesus tells us that there is great joy in heaven, "*joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents*" (Luk. 15:10).

The angels rejoice because they know there is forgiveness for sin. They know what God did for mankind. He took on our flesh, so that He could be our Substitute. He suffered and died, so that every temptation into which we had fallen—every sin we had committed—would be blotted out.

That includes your sins and mine—sins committed in the public eye, and sins committed in the privacy of our homes. Jesus died for sins of the past that burden you and trouble your conscience even now. You can be freed from the guilt of those sins. Repent of them and believe Jesus' word of absolution. He paid for that sin too. He forgives all your sins.

There is nothing you have done that the angels assigned to you have not witnessed. They have seen it all. But they are not ashamed or reluctant to serve you because of your sins. God loves you, so they do too. They marvel at God's love for sinners. They rejoice that He is such a good and merciful Lord, and they want nothing more than for each of us to join them in God's glorious kingdom.

This is why the Lord sends them to us. He wants the angels to do their part in humble service to Him, so we are not tempted away from the faith, but so that we retain a childlike faith in Him our Savior.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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