

The Feast of St. Michael

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[0 : 0 0] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Please be seated. Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones.

For I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. With these words, Jesus shows us both the care of the angels and the call to humility.

What seems small and overlooked on earth is known and honored in heaven. And on this feast day of St. Michael and all angels, the church lifts our eyes to that reality.

The dignity of the least of Christ's disciples and the ministry of the angels who stand before the face of God. The setting of this teaching is revealing.

We heard in verse 1 of our gospel text this morning. At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

[1 : 0 7] Their question shows pride of the human heart. They are not thinking of repentance or service, but of rank and recognition.

In response, then Jesus called a little child to him, set him in the midst of them and said, Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Christ takes a child, one with no social standing, no voice, and no status beyond what their fathers gave them.

Children were not yet full members of society. Yet, Jesus places a little child at the forefront and says, Here is the sign of true greatness in my kingdom.

Then Jesus says, Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. The one content to have no status in this life is the one that will be honored in the next life.

[2 : 1 7] This is a reversal of earthly logic. True power is shown in humility and true greatness is found in serving the weak.

Mickelmas reminds us of the same truth. For even the mighty angels, so glorious that men in scripture fall down in fear before them, live not for themselves, but for God.

Their greatness lies in their service, in their joy in beholding the Father's face. Our Lord then takes the child to himself.

By this he shows that the lowliest disciple is embraced and honored as his own. Jesus says, Whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me.

To welcome such a believer to stumble is to invite severe judgment. Our Lord goes on to say, Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

[3 : 3 2] This is not ordinary imagery. In the ancient world, a millstone was so large that only a strong beast could turn it.

To be cast into the sea with such weight was to be utterly lost. Jesus rarely speaks with such severe language. He says, however, that to exploit or mislead the weak is worse than the sins we usually think of as great.

The world may shrug at such harm, but God does not. To him, it is intolerable. Then comes the language of sacrifice.

He says, If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. Our Lord uses strong words to wake us up.

If one would part with a hand or an eye to save the body, how much more must pride, envy, and selfish ambition be cast away to save the soul?

[4 : 42] Nothing is worth the loss of eternal life. At this point, we remember St. Michael, who in the book of Revelation is shown fighting the dragon and casting him down by the power of God.

His greatness is not in self-assertion, but obedience to God's will. The archangel serves, defends, and guards.

And in this, he is the example of what Christ calls us to be. The angels' warfare is not for their own honor, but for the protection of God's little ones.

And that leads us back to the promise that in heaven, their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

This shows how heaven regards even the least disciple. The very ones despised on earth are attended by those closest to the throne.

[5 : 45] In the ancient world, to see the king's face meant to have constant access to his presence, the privilege of his most trusted in court.

Angels are described in this way in Daniel as representing whole nations, and in Revelation as representing churches. Yet, here Jesus declares that even the humblest and the lowliest individual believer has heavenly representatives and guardians who stand before the throne of God.

Jewish teaching spoke of angels accompanying the just on earth and presenting their calls before God in heaven. Our Lord takes that expectation and confirms it.

His disciples, however small or unnoticed, are defended by angels who both walk with them here and stand as their advocates before the Father.

And the little ones include not only children, but all who are weak, vulnerable, and easily forgotten.

[7 : 01] The sick, the poor, the elderly, the overlooked. We may look away from them, but God never does.

We may be ashamed of them, but God appoints angels who gaze always upon his face on their behalf. To despise even one of the little ones is not only to scorn a fellow believer, it is to part company with the Father himself, who counts every one of them as precious.

The feast of Michaelmas, then, teaches us that heaven's order is not built on pride, but humility. The least on earth are honored in heaven.

The lowly are defended by angels. And above all, Christ himself took the lowest place, humbling himself even to the cross that he might raise us to share his glory.

So let us give thanks for the wonderful order God has made, for the ministry of his angels, for the dignity of his little ones, and for the victory of his Son.

[8 : 25] Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen.