

+ FEAST OF SAINT MICHAEL AND ALL THE ANGELS

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
September 29, 2018

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

Benedicite Dominum, omnes Angeli...Bless the Lord, all ye his Angels : you that are mighty in strength, and execute his word, hearkening to the voice of his orders.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My Very Dear Sons,

It is Our Lord Himself, who sets forth the spiritual and very *sobering* tone for today's feast of the great Saint Michael and of all the Holy Angels. Here is what He says:

Whosoever...shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven: and he that shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me; but he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea...See that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you, that their angels in heaven always see the face of the Father who is in heaven.¹

At the end of our special Novena of prayer and penance occasioned in part by scathing revelations about clerical abuse—even, in some cases, involving the complicity of members of the Church hierarchy—, it is good to gather the fruits of our labors over the past nine days and to look for some lessons that might guide us as we go forward in our lives of faith. I would like to group these reflections around the light-filled figure of Saint Michael.

To begin with, the very name of this Archangel is a lesson in itself. As you know, Michael means in Hebrew “Who is like God?” The answer to the implied rhetorical question is, precisely, “no one.” No one else even comes close to the perfection of transcendent being that characterizes God. This is obvious—or is it? The Catholic faithful suppose that such fundamental truths as those concerning the very nature of God would be the foundation of the studies carried out in seminaries and in all major Catholic institutions of higher learning. It may well be, however, that over the past few decades this has not really been the case. Such could be one of the reasons for failures in the clergy. One would likewise tend to think that most sermons heard in Catholic churches would revolve around the mystery of God. But it is to be feared that a close examination of what priests have most often preached from the pulpit in recent times hovers much closer to the ground. No doubt a preacher must adapt himself to the minds of those listening, but, perhaps, there has been so much adaptation as to forget—practically, not in theory, but for all practical purposes—the transcendent nature of the One true God in Three Persons. *Quis ut Deus?* Who is like unto the Supreme Being, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? May the prince of angels, Saint Michael, teach us again to approach with awe and infinite respect the

¹ Matthew 18: 4-6; 10.

very being of God through the theological virtue of Faith, of Faith seeking to understand ever better the mystery, until the vision, as we hope, transforms this limited understanding into the blessed gaze. What a wonderful beginning that would make in restoring all things in Christ!

My next consideration revolves around the nature of the angelic being. Another aspect of the Holy Archangel's mystery, after that of his name, is that of his nature: the very fact that he is a pure spirit. Angels, as we know, are able to intervene in human history, and in order to do this they often take on the appearance of a man, but they have no material body. They are purely spiritual beings. The term "angel" actually refers, not to the nature, but to the fact that a given spirit is sent as a messenger upon mission. We think of the mission of Saint Raphael to Tobias or of Saint Gabriel sent to Our Lady at the Annunciation. So, these spiritual messengers are by nature without matter, without bodies. Is this consideration of the nature of our angelic friends a good subject of meditation? What about the Incarnation? Were we to exalt all that is spiritual to the exclusion of the world of physical bodies, might we not run the terrible risk of falling into a heresy such as that which deceived Saint Augustine in his youth, the Manichean heresy, where the universe is divided into two equally powerful but opposite principles, and where all material beings are evil in denial even of the human nature of Christ? To the contrary, we must always hold firmly to the Catholic truth that God created all things good, including our visible and very beautiful natural world. Nevertheless, as through our bodies especially, we human beings are weighed down and tempted by carnal desires, the Gospel and Saint Paul exhort us to seek the higher things, the more spiritual things. In His great dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Our Lord spoke of those who "adore the Father in spirit and in truth."² In turn, the Apostle Saint Paul exhorts us to "...walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."³

Finally, it seems that Saint Michael, this very humble and spiritual servant of God, can offer us a much needed lesson in the virtue of fortitude. In fact, it is Saint Gabriel, another Archangel, whose name means "Fortitude" or "Strength of God." But the Apocalypse of Saint John we read that Saint Michael leads the Heavenly Host in battle against the demons. He too is a being of great fortitude. As we face a spiritual crisis in our decadent Western world that often looks like the very end-times (but no one knows), we need a powerful assistance and example to remain strong in the Faith. In the face of a world grown cold in charity and solicitous for none but the most material interests, we need a rebirth of supernatural Charity and a new dose of moral strength, of spiritual fortitude. In a society where the unborn seem to pose a threat to the false liberty of people unwilling to grow up and face their responsibilities—how absurd!—, in a world where the elderly are made to feel like an unwanted and costly burden, a certain boldness of purpose is required to set things straight. Perhaps we should re-examine the ancient idea of Christian knighthood...It is often said these days that men are being sidelined by women, in the academic world and in many areas of work. This is somewhat true, but not a sign of authentic progress in many cases. In any event, it would do great good to rediscover the profound nature of a manly sense of service that really, in the end, is an imitation of Christ in His Passion. How did a sizeable portion of the Catholic clergy (they are by no means the only group, but we are speaking of them in particular), how did these men of God, as revealed in recent studies, become so utterly "soft" (to put it nicely) and open to horrible forms of decadence? This is something the Church will have to ponder. Perhaps the restoration of this Christian knightly service,

² John 4:23.

³ Gal. 5:16.

through the example first of laymen in the world, assisted at every step by good women whose role is no less essential, perhaps in view of this sort of reinvigoration of the role of men, a large portion of the clergy would embrace again the radical ideal of self-sacrifice that is their own mode of the virtue of fortitude. Perhaps, then, our men of the cloth would all walk more truly in the spirit, in adoration of the Father; perhaps we would see a new day, a restoration of all things in Christ. “For the time is,” writes Saint Peter—and he seems to be speaking to us—, “that judgment should begin at the house of God.”⁴

May the incomparable Saint Michael along with all the other holy Archangels and Angels, in profound worship of the thrice holy God above all, and in service of the Queen of Angels, come to our aid in spiritual battle! Amen.

⁴ 1 Peter 4:17.