

CHRIST'S AUTHORITY OVER THE DEVIL

Our sermon for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels is taken from our inspired readings, with our thoughts centered on the following translated verse:

Only in this all of you shall rejoice not, that the spirits submit to all of you; but all of you rejoice that your names remain having been written in the heavens.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Those who are regular in receiving God's gifts here have noticed the new banner hanging on the Northeast wall of the Nave. There the Holy One Who is as God is depicted casting down the Accuser of God's people. Michael is pictured as He prepares to slay the Deceiver of mankind. That image serves to mark a fourth division of the long, green Trinity season. This is the particular time of the year in which we are given, specifically through the readings and hymns of the Church, greater insight into Christ's authority over the devil and all his works and all his ways.

To mark all that and more, the Church, for at least fourteen centuries, has appointed and celebrated the Feast of St. Michael. That means that the green of Trinity is replaced this week with the white of Christ. Since white is used in the Church to mark either Feasts of Christ, or days of remembrance of those who died without being killed for the right confession of Christ, from the color of the day we should be able to determine the emphasis of this day.

That is to say, the emphasis of this White Feast must be Jesus the Christ!

¹ Luke 10:20.

Since we desire to be found faithful to the right confession of Christ, such is the conclusion we must come to about this day called Michaelmas, or, “The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels.” After all, we believe, teach and confess, (this is a fairly long quote, so I ask for your attentiveness):

Although angels in heaven pray for us (as Christ himself also does), and although saints on earth, and perhaps also in heaven, do likewise, it does not follow that we should invoke angels and saints, pray to them, keep fasts and festivals for them, say Masses and offer sacrifices to them, establish churches, altars, and services for them, serve them in still other ways, regard them as helpers in time of need, and attribute all sorts of help to them, assigning to each of them a special function, as the papists teach and practice. This is idolatry. Such honor belongs to God alone.²

It is on record, in part because of that teaching, that the Reformers in the 16th century removed all sorts of feasts to angels and saints from the calendar. Yet, they left this one in because they viewed it as a principal feast about Christ. The Gradual Hymn for today, composed by one of the chief reformers for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels confesses why he kept, and we keep, this feast, even as we sang:

But watchful is the angel band... that follows Christ on ev'ry hand... to guard His people where they go... and break the counsel of the foe.³

Dr. Martin Luther, God's chief instrument in the Reformation of the Church catholic once wrote concerning this Feast: *this Michael in Revelation, that's none other than our Lord, Jesus Christ, Himself.* While we are not bound to the confession of Martin Luther where it is recorded outside of the *Book of Concord*, here are some of the words which prompted his proclamation tying Michael and Christ:

*War became in the heaven: the Michael and the angels of Him warring with the dragon. And the dragon warred also with the angels of him, and he had not strength, and no place was found for them then in the heaven.*⁴

Perhaps, in finding in texts like that Holy Michael as Christ, Dr. Luther held in his thoughts (as I do) these words of Jesus to the seventy(two):

*"I have continued to see the Satan, as lightning, from the heaven having fallen."*⁵

Jesus, Who is the Christ, appears to be declaring that reality in a now and not yet framework. As true God, Jesus witnessed the fall of Satan from before the foundation of the world. The Son of God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit who in the unity of Persons know all things for all time, beheld the Angel of Light's fall from grace before he was even created!

Even so, Jesus, then in the eternal knowledge of the glory of Satan flashing away from him as an instant of lightning as he fell from heaven to earth – ties the work of preaching the kingdom of God to Satan's fall. Jesus' words to those who had witnessed demons submitting to them at the preaching of God's Kingdom of Grace in Christ bind those events. That connection is of vital importance for those who would be named with the Name of Christ from that day until the Last Day. Why?

First, it means that Satan has been barred from accusing, the meaning of his name, you of your sins before the Father in heaven. The Accuser of God's children

² *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. 1959 (T. G. Tappert, Ed.) (297). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

³ Melancthon, Philipp. *Lutheran Service Book*, "Lord God, to Thee We Give All Praise," St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006. 522.

⁴ Revelation 12:7-8.

⁵ Luke 10:18.

cannot stand before the eternal Judge, either now or on the Last Day. There is no one left before God to bring a case against those who cling to Christ in the Faith.

Second, it means that you have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus the Christ, who stands in for you before the Father. He defends you, intercedes for you, day and night, even though your Accuser has no place in the heavenly realm. Since Jesus is for you, and your Accuser is barred from the heavenly court, there is no one to bring a charge against you before your heavenly Father. That truth lies behind these words of our Lord:

Only in this all of you shall rejoice not, that the spirits submit to all of you; but all of you rejoice that your names remain having been written in the heavens.⁶

Third, Christians face the reality that Satan with all his minions, one-third of the created angelic spirits, is alive and well upon the earth.⁷ That means he and they can, will, and do accuse and deceive you here. This our reading from the Revelation proclaims:

And he was cast down, the dragon, the great one, the snake, the ancient one, the one having been called Devil and the Satan, the one continually causing to wander the whole created world – he was cast down into the earth, and the angels of him with him they were cast down. (Rev. 12:9).

Fourth, all that means that the Body of Christ in mortal flesh, you dear Christians, will have trouble, trials, and tribulations on earth on account of the good confession of the Faith. The Satan, and his evil hosts, will work on the faithful, on you,

⁶ Luke 10:20.

⁷ Revelation 12:4.

when they can discern a chance to make you stumble away from living a life of repentance and forgiveness. They will tempt you to think that God remembers your sins that He has moved you to confess, and that He has forgiven. The evil ones have thousands of generations of experience deceiving humans by which they have learned to read how you might react to their temptations. After all, their leader, the Father of Lies, deceived our first mother. He and his hosts have been doing so to her children ever since.

Take heart. The devils are not all powerful. They are not omniscient nor omnipresent – all knowing and present everywhere. They are what their leader’s descriptive title, “διαβολος,” means: “deceiver.” Lucifer, the God-given name of the δρακοντος, dragon, was the most beautiful of the Angels: He was the Angel of Light – perhaps why the Son of God saw him in his fall streak like lightning to earth. Lucifer, the Satan, the Devil, the Dragon who has come to earth works his angelic wonder in order to deceive God’s elect, if that were possible.

He, and the fallen spirits with him, roam about this fallen world, looking for opportunities to deceive those who are marked with the blood of Jesus. It seems their favorite weapon to use against the children of the Light, you who bear the Name of Jesus, is the Word of God. Following the lead of Lucifer, whose light can be deceptive, they attempt to lure you away from the clear Word of God, tempting you to think, while facing temptation to some sin or another, “Did God really say?”

They have been very successful in such deception based upon the Word of God. This becomes true especially after they were bound to earth in the death of Jesus. The Dragon and his angels have caused not just individuals – really small prey hardly worth their effort – but entire congregations and assemblies of congregations, to doubt, corrupt, and ignore the clear Word of God. In so doing, they continue to lead many away from the pure Word of God. They are successful when they get people who call themselves Christian to deny their sinful natures, and thus lead them, us, you, to deny our sins. When the devils accomplish that, they then seal their triumph by turning those who now no longer believe their sins to be sin, to a Jesus who is not the Jesus of the Scripture. They turn heart thoughts from the conquering Jesus, the victory Trophy on the Cross Who now rules in glory – depicted on the Northwest wall here. The evil angels entice those who were in the Church following the Lion of the Tribe of Judah – a title for the Christ – and substitute for them the Deceiver who appears as a Lion.

Christ becomes replaced in those who deny the verbally inspired Word of God in all its parts with Anti-Christ. And those who would be called Christian begin to believe that one can be saved by following his or her conscience and sincerely trying to be good. Hear this example from the official confession of the Church of Anti-Christ (again, a long quote):

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Jesus Christ or his Church, but who nonetheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of

*their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.*⁸

There is the message of the Devil regarding the salvation of the souls of those who do not know Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, Savior Who shed His blood to set people from sin and the works of the Law. To sum up the Deceiver's teaching we may use this phrase: "Try harder, and you may get salvation!" How does that work, if you've tried it?

You see, when you try harder to follow your conscience with a sincere heart, you discover that your heart is not sincere, and your conscience accuses you. Or, left long enough in unrepentant sin, one's conscience can become seared, and he or she will no longer be able to know right from wrong. Why, without the work of Christ on your behalf, your conscience can become your own personal Satan – Accuser! The message of the Angel Lucifer, and his hosts is: you can do it.

The message of the Ruler of the Angels – that is what the title Archangel means – is: you cannot do it yourself. God knows that. That is why He sent the Ultimate Messenger of His Grace, the Son of God, into our flesh. He came to "do it all" for you. That means that the Good News of the Archangel is that He has, and continues to, cast out your accuser, even here on earth, in particular from your conscience.

This He first did, when through the Water and Word of Holy Baptism, He commanded the devil to flee from you to make room for the Holy Spirit. This He

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, New York: Doubleday, 1994, 244.

continues to do as His Word calls you to repent of your sins, moves you to sorrow over them and will to turn from them, and then declares to you the power of God. That power, the Word of the Christ, the Ruler over all in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, grants you the forgiveness He died to bring to you.

All of that brings us back to the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit which slays our old evil foe. As stated earlier, Jesus ties the casting out of Satan to the proclamation of the Word of God, namely the coming of the Kingdom of God in the Presence of Jesus. This means that the true Messenger of God, the genuine Angel of God, declares to you the Christ, Jesus, the Son of God Who through the Word of God, casts your accusers from you. This power God gives to His messengers, His human angels. Through the Word, He grants them authority over the fallen Angel of Light, the Accuser and Deceiver on mankind and all his hosts. In that Word, our spiritual eyes are opened to see that those who are for us are far greater in number than those who are against us. In the proclaiming of Christ the Victor, the true Leader of the heavenly hosts, the Church receives His authority to conquer our eternal foes until the Last Day. Then He will remove them from us forever. *All of you rejoice that your names remain having been written in the heavens*

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Feast of St. Michael and All Angels
II Kings 6:8-17; Revelation 12:7-12; Luke 10:17-20
September 29, 2013
Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria