

Angels' Age

Michaelmas!

On 29th September, we celebrate the Feast Day of St. Michael and All Angels.

St. Michael, the Archangel, the protector of Christians from the Devil and all his works!

A Gaelic Prayer .

**O Michael Militant, thou King of the Angels,
Shield thy people with the power of thy sword,
Spread thy wings over land and sea
East and West, and shield us from the foe
Brighten thy feast from heaven above
Be with us in the pilgrimage and the twistings of the fight!**

I am wondering what special prayer the ordinands were given in preparation for their Michaelmas ordination? The language of the above is rather more colourful than the Collect for the day which reads:-

Everlasting God,

You have ordained and constituted the ministry of angels and mortals in a wonderful order: Grant that as your holy angels always serve you in heaven, so, at your command, they may help and defend us on earth, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

What do you think?

Michael means "Who is like God?" That would be a good question for all of us, including Jo and the rest of the ordinands ordained last weekend. It is a question that will continually be asked throughout life as we join that great journey that is to be experienced especially in priesthood. I don't think I want to try for an answer on this occasion save to say that what the stories of our faith give

us intuitively is some sense of being guided, encouraged and strengthened by the same God who guided, encouraged and strengthened our forebears including Jesus Himself. But the guardian angel who accompanies us is a far cry from some of the statues we see. Michael the Archangel was nothing like that-perhaps like nothing we have ever experienced -he is a formidable opponent to all who threaten the faithful and whom we pray will guard us, encourage us, fight for us until (by the grace of God) WE strengthen those who stand, comfort and help the faint hearted, raise up the fallen and finally beat down Satan under our feet as the Biblical Michael did.

Jesus, in that lovely human story about Nathaniel, even speaks of his "supporters" in a way you ain't seen nothing yet. "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" an even greater vision than Jacob's ladder, with its angels. Jacob declares on waking from his dream "Surely the Lord is in this place-AND I DID NOT KNOW IT!" Nathaniel, waking up from his ordinary but faithful life has an insight building on his understanding of his God as he (like any good Jew sits under his fig tree as forecast by King Solomon) being told that there is more to come from this prophet from Nazareth. Nathaniel's stumbling block which governed his belief crumbled. AND NOW HE KNEW IT! So he followed Jesus. What he saw at the end is left to our imaginations-but there would have been angels doing what is believed to be their eternal task of carrying the earth's prayers upwards to God and bringing judgements and blessings back down to His Glory.

At a funeral recently (limited to 30 visible mourners because of the Covid restrictions placed upon us-and observed) our attention was drawn to the great cloud of witnesses joining us on the Internet, unseen but present. We could only hum, they could sing their hearts out. We hummed as they say angels do, they lifted their voices like a great Sanctus. All new clergy may need to appreciate this when their congregation is two or three gathered together. We retirees might need to remind ourselves of the angels and archangels and all the heavenly host that join us, and have joined us when life has been hard.

So, what are we to make of these “immaterial spirits created by God to regulate the order of the world and serve as messengers in regard to human salvation?” As inheritors of all things related to the Enlightenment, we could remain sceptical-unless you have had some experience (or you are persuaded by others’ experiences). I never found that I could pour scorn on some of the stories told me during my time as a parish priest. I would suppose that that would have been a stumbling block to my accepting the validity of Michael and his host of angels. I have had to be grateful for even conceding to the possibility of such divine phenomena.

Imagine then that these are your prayer partners. Imagine that you are on the side of the angels. We have all the “holy principalities and powers with us” in our praying. All those small unimportant and often persecuted churches scattered around Asia Minor went cheerfully about their calling to be the light of the world in the knowledge that they lived with all heaven around them. Do we not? George Herbert called prayer (amongst many other descriptions) ANGELS AGE. When we pray, that is the age we live in too!

My question for this Feast Day (and every day) is this :
If we do not pray, are we ever able to trample down Satan under our feet?
Pray for our ordinands, our deacons, our priests, our church.

Revd Chris Fletcher

Appointed Lessons :

Genesis 28:10-17

Psalms 103:19-22

John 1: 47-51

Hebrews 1: 5-14

Revelation 12: 7-12

Prayers which can be adapted for your own intercessions

1. As we pray for the whole Church throughout the world, we remember the newly ordained at Michaelmas, especially Jo.

We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have overcome the forces of evil by your cross. Grant to us the full outpouring of your splendour and appoint your holy angels to be our defenders, to guard our going out and our coming in, until we take our place with Michael the Archangel at your right hand in glory, where you reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

2. And so we pray for help and protection, especially for those who have St. Michael as their patron :-

For security forces and paratroopers, especially those who live and work close to us in Hereford in military intelligence and Special Forces that they may help to preserve peace safely.

For grocers and supermarket workers that they may experience satisfactory and fair working conditions and be respected by those they serve so that justice and equity prevails in the workplace.

For radiologists and radiotherapists and all who support them in our hospitals. We ask that all scientific and medical research may always be directed toward the health and welfare of the sick, especially those who suffer the ravages or the fear of cancer.

For the dying, that when the time comes, through the mercy of a loving God, death will be free from fear in the knowledge that we are accompanied by angels and archangels and all the heavenly host on our final journey

3. For ourselves:-

We thank you, Father, that we have been refreshed by the protection and ministry of your angels, and pray that we may continue to serve you on earth as they serve you in heaven, rejoicing in our eternal companionship.

Lord on your mercy : hear our prayer.