

St. Michael and All Angels (observed):
October 2, 2022

When we are worshiping God here on earth, God sees what our eyes are unable to see. In his epistle to the Ephesians St. Paul instructs Christians on how they are to live in their daily duties. Wives submit to your husbands as the church submits to Christ. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved his church and gave himself up for her. Children obey your parents. Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger, but instruct them in the fear of God. Servants, be obedient to your masters, knowing that you are serving the Lord Jesus. Masters, be kind to your servants, knowing that you have one Master and Lord in heaven. Paul is teaching us all to do our duties according to where God has placed us. And then, in chapter 6, he tells us something, which is tremendously important. He says that we are not fighting against flesh and blood but against the rulers, authorities, and lords of this dark world, against the evil spirits that are in the heavenly places.

When you are doing your regular, earthly duties here on earth, it may seem rote and meaningless at times. It's also filled with frustrations, conflicts, and all sorts of heartaches. You grow familiar with your spouse, your children, your neighbors, your parents, your fellow Christians. Then you come to church, and it seems we do the same thing every Sunday. You then go home, and you start it all over again. Yes, it's all very familiar. And as the saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt. We easily lose sight of how God is working through it all. But Scripture tells us that there is something going on, which our eyes can't see. There is a battle going on. It is a battle for your faith, a war over your very soul. Where is this battle? It's in the heavenly places. This is another way of describing the spiritual realm. While you are doing your everyday duties, the angels of God are fighting against the wicked demons and spirits of darkness. They are God's heavenly army, fighting to protect you from every evil and deceitful way of the devil.

As we gather for around the gospel and sacraments, we are listening to our Shepherd's voice. Our faith is strengthened, and we are given rest for our souls. Then the Holy Spirit leads us by his Word to apply God's promises to our lives in our daily duties. Husbands and wives are to see their union as a picture of Christ and the church. Children are to honor their parents with the assurance that their Father in heaven hears their prayers and will support them on their way. Workers are to do their work with the assurance that their Master in heaven is gracious to them. The Word of God, the body and blood of Jesus, the absolution and sure promises of God, which we all receive together this morning – they continue with us. They remain our worship as we receive whatever God gives us.

Again, these may seem like ordinary things. But the Bible reveals to us what God himself sees. When we are worshipping him here on earth, our Father in heaven sees the true battle over our souls. I would like to discuss four examples from the Bible, which reveal this to us.

First, let's consider the book of Job. Job feared God. He worshiped God. While he was making a sacrifice, he trusted in the mercy, which God would show through the sacrifice of his own Son. Job was also a husband and a father. So as he worshiped God, he prayed for his children. Then suddenly the text reveals to us what the eyes can't see. As the children of God are hearing his Word, gathering around his throne of grace, Satan tries to accuse them. As Job worships the Lord, Satan claims that Job is only faithful to God because of how much God has blessed him in this life. This is what the devil does. The name Satan means accuser. He is the one who leads us into sin. And then he tries to accuse us before God's throne. When you gather to confess your sins and receive from God the forgiveness he promises for Jesus' sake, the devil tries to accuse you as well. But God won't hear it. Sure, God will allow you to experience the devil's threats. But this is only

so that he might test our faith and prove that his promises to us are true. He certainly did this with his servant Job. And he does the same for us.

Second, let us consider the book of Zechariah. About a thousand years after Job lived, there was a priest named Joshua. He and his fellow Israelites had just returned to Jerusalem after being exiled to Babylon. God had sent the Babylonians against Jerusalem as a punishment. His people had been unfaithful to him, and God was disciplining them. But now God was having mercy on them. He brought them back to Jerusalem and commanded them to rebuild the temple. And he made Joshua the high priest to lead his people in worship of the one true God. So Joshua led God's people in worship. When the people of the land were harassing Joshua and the rest of God's church, charging them with rebelling against the king, God sent his prophet Zechariah to encourage them to keep building and keep worshipping. And then God gave Zechariah a vision (Zech 3). In this vision he showed him what was truly going on. It showed Joshua standing before the throne of the LORD with the LORD Christ standing beside him. And on the other side of the throne was Satan accusing Joshua before the throne of God. There he is again, doing what he always does. He accuses God's children. And it would seem that he had a lot to accuse them of. After all, they had sinned against God. They deserved to be left in Babylon. They didn't deserve to be brought back to their home. They didn't deserve God's favor. That's all true. But even when the devil's accusations ring true, he is still lying. Because God remains true to his promise in Christ.

So God showed Zechariah what happened next. The LORD Christ said to that lying serpent, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who chooses Jerusalem rebuke you! Isn't this man a brand snatched from the fire?" And so Christ does the same for us today. When the devil is accusing your conscience, telling you that you don't deserve God's favor, that your unkind words against your wife or children, your disrespect toward your parents, your perverted thoughts, and all the evil coming out of your sinful heart disqualify you from being called a child of God, Christ does not stand idly by. He doesn't just sit there while Satan accuses his bride, the church. No, by his perfect obedience to his Father in heaven, he has snatched us from the fires of hell. And by this salvation he silences the devil's attacks. In Zechariah's vision, Joshua was dressed in dirty clothes. But Christ said, "Take his dirty clothes off. See, I have taken your sins from you, and I dress you in festival garments." When you gather around God's Word to worship him, when the temptations of the devil are attacking your faith, and the guilt of your sin is weighing down on your conscience, Jesus gives you the assurance that he has taken away your sin and guilt. He clothes you with his own righteousness. As St. Paul says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. (Gal 3:27)"

The third part of Scripture I would like to discuss is from the tenth chapter of Luke's Gospel. Five centuries after Zechariah saw this vision of Joshua, the LORD Christ appeared in the flesh. He sent 72 of his disciples out to preach the gospel. And when they came back from their mission, he told them what he saw. While they were preaching the good news of salvation, Jesus saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. This is always what is happening when the gospel is being proclaimed. When faith is being created, when sinners confess their sins and take refuge in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, this is what God sees. He sees that lying serpent trying to accuse his children. And he casts him down. He won't hear any of it.

Finally, let's consider our Epistle lesson for today from the twelfth chapter of the Revelation given to the Apostle John. John was exiled to the Island of Patmos, because he was preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian church was being attacked and slandered. It was a Sunday, the Lord's Day. And just as the church has done ever since Jesus rose from the dead on that first Easter, John was worshipping God on Sunday. While he was worshipping, God revealed to John the true

spiritual reality. This revelation given to John shows us what God is doing for his church as she travels on her pilgrimage here on earth.

War broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels are fighting against the devil. And they have won. How have they won? How have they silenced the devil's accusations? The same way they always have and always will until Jesus returns. It is by the blood of the Lamb and his testimony. Michael means, "Who is like God." This brings to mind the first temptation into sin. The devil claimed that Adam and his wife would be like God if they ate the fruit he told them not to eat. It was a lie. But Jesus, who is the very image and likeness of God, has come to set the record straight. He has come to crush the devil's head. He had already done it. He has fulfilled what Job, Joshua, Zechariah, the apostles, and all people of all time were unable to fulfill. He didn't flinch at all when the devil tempted him. He overcame him with nothing but the Word of God. He was faithful to this Word all the way to his death on the cross. And now he gives this Word to us even today. He baptizes us into his own death. And the blood, which he pours into our mouths this morning, is the same blood that reconciled us to God and continues to shut the devil up.

This is the reality. The devil is completely shut out of heaven. But while we live here on earth, we still feel his threats. We still face his deceit as he tries to drive us away from our duties. He's angry that he has been defeated, and he comes after the church on earth as hard as he can. This is what we see, as churches, which used to preach the gospel, have become gatherings of the devil himself. Christ is reshaped to fit all kinds of political agendas. And Satan uses pulpits to justify all sorts of perversions, and when the faithful don't go along with these perversions, he accuses them of being judgmental and unloving. But when we gather around the gospel and sacraments, making use of his Word in whatever duty he has given us, we can know what is happening. We can know what our Father in heaven sees. Our Lord Jesus has revealed it to us. It is that the devil has lost. His accusations and threats, no matter how persuasive they might seem, are lies.

So don't be intimidated. Stay the course. Keep gathering around his Word. Keep doing the work God has prepared for you. Though you can see that your works are stained with all kinds of sin, the blood of Jesus has washed them away. And while temptations will flare up, God is only using them to drive you closer to his Word. He's teaching you not to love your life here on earth but to look to what your eyes cannot yet see. As you build on this foundation, relying on the blood of the Lamb and the truth of his gospel, you can be certain that you will finally behold his face and see in full what he sees. Amen.