

“On Guard at All Times”

Matthew 18:1-11

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Being an older sibling can be very taxing work sometimes, even if you're not the oldest. When properly executed, your role as protector and guardian of your younger siblings takes a lot of time and effort on your part. Especially, at least for me, if your younger siblings are both girls. You constantly have to be ready, on guard at all times, and prepared to do whatever is necessary to keep them safe, and keep the good for nothing boys away. But it isn't just something that siblings do because they really care for their sister or brother, it is something they do because it is part of God's purpose for them in this life. Within the context of their immediate family, they have been given this task of protection and care for those less capable and more in need of the additional comfort and support. In spiritual terms, the Lord has given us similar caretakers, each one having an “older brother” who is on guard at all times, ready to jump in at a moment's notice.

In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus says in verse 10, “For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.” What a comfort that is for the children of God in this life. Each one of you has an angel, what we often call a “guardian angel,” whose sole responsibility it is to watch over you and come to your aid at the Father's command. Today we celebrate St. Michael, the archangel, and all angels, because Michael's job is to be the guardian of God's people. In Daniel 12, from our Old Testament lesson, the Lord says, “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people.” Michael, and all of his troops, stand ready to move at the command of your Lord. As “one of the chief princes,” his charge is extended to those in his service, and that is where your guardian angel serves. They are on guard at all times against the foes of this world and against the fallen angels who serve at the behest of the prince of demons.

It cannot be denied that the devil and his demons, those who were cast out of heaven for their rebellion, are active and fighting against the people of God every day in this world. The simple fact that sin and evil exist in the world is because of his temptations and empty promises. Because of the sin of Adam, humanity is wide open to his attacks and manipulation, and the sad reality is that so many are lost in their sin and continue to succumb to it. But in reality, they have chosen to live that way. They want the freedom of choosing their sin over righteousness, and the demons are there whispering in their ear that what they are doing is just fine and they have nothing to fear.

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There's a tremendous number of problems with living in such a way, but the foremost of them is the abandonment and rejection of God, leading to eternal condemnation and being cast into the pit of fire.

The eternal prison of the devil and his demons is their destination for such arrogance and lack of faith. And the adversary is very good at telling them the lies they want to hear in order to keep them from the salvation which Christ has won for all mankind. His most heinous method of perpetrating his evil in the world is by using the false church which he has created in the world through his lies and deception. By leading people to conform to their reason and societal standards instead of the Word of God and His righteous standards, Satan has created a place that looks like the church in name only. He coerces men into believing that they can hear God speaking to them when it is just his minions. He convinces women that they belong in the pulpit preaching the Holy Word despite the Lord's admonition to the contrary. He belittles and blasphemes the Sacrament of the Altar, leading people to take it symbolically or even removing it from their services altogether.

Evil angels breed evil thoughts and actions, and by their cunning ways they mislead those who follow God into dark alleys and deep holes where there is no light or hope to be found. And so, the Lord Jesus empowers His angels to fight back in the spiritual realm against the demonic forces that oppress His people. He has given Michael the authority to command His angels concerning you, to protect you and shield you from the attacks of the devil. Much of this battle goes unseen, being fought on the spiritual plain, but the weapon of the angels is the same as yours. They fight the battle on the spiritual plain with the authority of Jesus Christ, with the very Word of God. It is in Him and through Him, by the proclamation of the Word and the administration of His sacraments that you fight alongside your guardian angel in this battle. Just the same as you do not fight alone, they don't either.

As created beings, though created beings who cannot sin, the heavenly army of the Lord of Hosts needs you fighting with them. By the strength of your faith, which is strong and bold by the gift of the Holy Spirit, there is a part for all of you to play. But not because victory hinges upon your participation, as if there is something you must do to make it a reality, but because your faith in Christ is what sustains you and it is Christ who sustains His angels. That is what He does for Michael in Daniel 11:1. Daniel records from His vision as the Son of God speaks about Michael, "And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him." As I mentioned a moment ago, angels are created beings, and as created beings they require sustenance and care from the one true God. They weary as they battle in much the same way that you

weary from the daily battles against the sinful flesh in this life. By the touch of the Savior, Michael was strengthened, girding him on to continue the fight against the fallen race of angels.

The touch of Christ is what sustains them, and it is what sustains you. There is no blind faith required here. You see with your eyes and taste with your mouth that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). He is truly present here to touch you with His Word of forgiveness and His very body and blood at this table. The medicine of immortality destroys the sin that lives within you, because at the cross, where Jesus shed His blood and gave up His Spirit for you, He put an end to the power of sin, death, and the devil. It no longer has its hold on you, and your angels know that truth too. They fight all the more, knowing that victory is not just inevitable, it has already been won. The realization of that victory when He returns to us on the clouds of heaven will be a glorious day of victory for all of His creation. We will rejoice with all the heavenly host, angels and saints together, as the trumpets sound, the devil and his minions are cast into the bottomless pit, and we are welcomed into the glory of our heavenly home.

Battles and misfortunes will befall all people in this lost and sinful world. But for the Christian, the baptized child of God, these battles are not fought alone, and comfort is not hard to find. Your heavenly Father has charged your angel to be your protector and to guard and keep you until the day of His coming. He says in Psalm 91, “No evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Without a doubt, your guardian angel is here protecting you every where you go. But more than that, they are fighting the battles with the devil and his demons on the spiritual plain. It is they who keep the demons at bay as they fight alongside their general Michael and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The protection that they provide, though, is so much more than a simple guarding of your physical and emotional well-being. They fight to protect your very soul and keep it in the faith which is sustained in you by the Holy Spirit. The devil and his fallen angels afflict and oppress the Christian from the outside, but God’s angels, those who have been confirmed in the good, protect you from the inside. They are guarding your heart against the onslaught of Satan, who desires nothing more than to drag you to eternal death and destruction. And no matter the outcome, even if on the surface it seems like the devil has won the battle, the war has already been won on our behalf. Sin, death, and his power are defeated in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Son of God has declared victory in the house of the enemy, though he refuses to yield.

The final victory is still to come, as Jesus says in Matthew 16:27, “For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father.” When the last trumpet sounds (on a day we will never know until it arrives), Christ our Savior will appear with His angels, with your angels, to gather you unto Himself and all who belong in His sheepfold. And so, we stand on guard at all times, side by side with our guardian angels, and we pray, just as we sang in our closing stanza of the Sermon Hymn:

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abram's bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my Fount of grace,
Lord Jesus Christ,
My prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end. Amen.