

Daniel 12:1-3; Psalm 16; Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-8
26th Sunday after Pentecost B; 11.17.24; G. Miles Smith+

Today I want to talk about...Michael... Just which one? Well, we have quite a few in the parish... But I'm sure, to their great relief, I am not referring to any of them!

I'm referring to the Michael mentioned this morning in the *Book of Daniel* in the Old Testament. And this Michael can also be found in the New Testament books of *Jude* (9-10) and *Revelation* (12:7-12). This Michael is also found in our *prayer book*, with a special prayer for him on page 244 that goes like this:

Everlasting God, you have ordained and constituted in a wonderful order the ministries of angels and mortals: Mercifully grant that, as your holy angels always serve and worship you in heaven, so by your appointment they may help and defend us here on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

This prayer is in our prayer book to be said especially on September 29th with is the major feast day of "Saint Michael and All Angels". It is also interesting to note that the prayer book considers that day of commemoration for Saint Michael the Archangel to be on the *same level of importance as Thanksgiving Day!* (p. 17)

Saint Michael is not a human being of course and so he is considered a "saint" in a different way than human beings can be...in the most original sense of "saint" meaning "holy". So, Michael is called a "saint" because he is a *holy angel*. He is also commonly known as the *chief Archangel of the other archangels and angels*. That places him among the highest order of celestial spiritual beings *that interact with human beings*. There is only one other order of celestial spiritual beings which have often been thought to be the highest order, above the archangels and those are the "cherubim and seraphim"...*who interact with God only*.

Actually, the whole tradition of celestial spiritual beings is complex and there are variations between Christian denominations in the particulars of how this is all conceived. Nevertheless, it is worth observing that the figure of *Saint Michael the Archangel* does stand out in Christian tradition *with a clarity of focus that is not afforded any other celestial spiritual beings*. And his prevalence is vast throughout the Church, especially Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. He is not as prevalent in Protestantism--but neither is he denied—because, after all, he *is* mentioned, however briefly, in the Bible.

The representation of Michael in paintings and iconography is also vast but he can commonly be recognized as being the only angel that wears *armor*, carries a *sword*, and is often standing over a winged man or a dragon representing Satan. As I have thought about this Michael, I was rather surprised to realize that I have long had his icon near me in my church office here and before but--like anything else in our abundant surroundings--it can be easy to become blind to what is closest at hand. So I have returned to looking at that image of Michael. The one I have is very much an image of power...but also of...kindness.

Michael is believed to be the *guardian and spiritual warrior* for the Jews...for the Church...for those who are sick...or near death...a champion for justice...and the patron saint of knights, police, paramedics, soldiers, and paratroopers (especially the 82nd Airborne Division of the US Army).

This is just skimming the surface of tradition about Saint Michael the Archangel, and it can all be very interesting. But I bring it up...not as an intellectual curiosity...nor to advocate for becoming distracted by the vast panoply of saints and celestial spiritual beings that have long been a part of Christian tradition and still are...but to invite us to *a larger vision of God than we may have become accustomed to*.

Just as we have a "great high priest" Jesus Christ in the heavens, as the Letter to the Hebrews has been speaking of these past few Sundays...it is reasonable to believe that Jesus is not alone there...but in the midst of what has

been variously described in our liturgies as...the “heavenly host” or the “heavenly chorus”. But not only is *Jesus* not alone...in the celestial presence of God...*neither are we...even here on earth.*

It seems more and more to me that it is important that Christians reawaken to the reality...that there are more things in heaven and earth...than we may commonly dream of these days (~Hamlet). And that that “more” is far more...than the next human scientific discovery...or the next technological marvel. But that there is also the “more” of our being in a vast spiritual company of beneficent celestial spiritual beings...who are also of God’s making.

It is certainly fair to wonder where the line between creative imagination and reality is...when we speak of such things as this. But it is also fair to say that such creative imagination can in fact be *inspired by reality.*

It could just be...that God has revealed to us...such things...that there is in fact a vast heavenly host in the presence of God...so that...we may not...lose hope...and continue to encourage one another.

