

Michaelmas
St. Luke 10:17-20; Revelation 12:7-9

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

War arose in heaven.

Despite my comments last week, it seems unfathomable. The place where the Holy God reigns and controls all things is the place thought of to be peaceful, ordered by Him whom the Scriptures call the Prince of peace. (cf. Isaiah 9:6) Nevertheless, war arose out in heaven. The Apostle John was permitted a glimpse of this heavenly battle:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!”

War arose in heaven. Michael and his angels fought Satan and his angels, and Michael prevailed. Satan was cast out; no longer was there a place for him in heaven. And the heavens and all who dwell in them rejoice.

The good guys won the war in heaven; there should be no doubt that that was the expected outcome. All the same, it's not all good news. Heaven has been sanctified, and that's good. The devil has been thrown out, and that's good. War has been waged and Michael and the heavenly angels have conquered for Christ's sake, and that is very good. But the war and the battling has spilled out. Now, the devil is just here—he's consolidated and focused on harming those on earth. It is worse now in these last days because of this. (paragraph based on a fellow pastor's sermon)

Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. (cf. 1 Peter 5:8) He has been cast out of heaven, and he's angry. In his wrath, he causes you to suffer on this side of eternity.

- So, you suffer in your flesh, afflicted by his wrath and your old, sinful nature. These work against you to remind you that you are mortal, that you are dust and to dust you shall return. (cf. Genesis 3:19) And so, you suffer maladies and illnesses, cancers and injuries. You get bruised and bloodied. You're dying. Satan is angry.
- So, you suffer in this world, afflicted by his wrath and your old, sinful nature. These work against you to show you that your brother does not love you, and you do not love your brother. Hatred, envy, strife, malcontent are just a few of the words that can be used. And so, you suffer the wrath of your fellow man and cause them to suffer to the harm of your and their person, possessions, and reputations. Satan is angry.
- So, you suffer in the Church, afflicted by the devil's wrath and your old, sinful nature. Yes, he is active along with your sinful nature in the Church Militant. These work against you to show you that, even among those who are your fellow saints, there is hatred, envy, strife, and malcontent. And so, you suffer the wrath of your fellow saints and cause them to suffer to the harm of your and their person, possessions, and reputation. Satan is angry.

Why is Satan angry? Dr. Louis Brighton commented that Satan has been expelled from the

place he thinks is rightfully his. This, dear hearers, is good news for you. The war in heaven is also a war of words—"the words with which Satan accused God's saints of their sins. With these words Satan claimed that he, not the Christ, truthfully represented the saints before God's heavenly throne." You can see this happening as Satan makes his way to the Divine Council in Job (cf. Job 1:6-11; 2:1-5) and Zechariah (cf. Zechariah 3:1-7), to accuse Job and Joshua the high priest.

Take these words seriously, folks, for the words the devil would speak, surprisingly, are true, at least to some degree. He would stand before your Father in heaven and accuse you of your sins and claim that for them, you deserve to die, which is true. Though, it's not outside the realm of possibility that he would exaggerate and twist things to be worse than they are, whatever that might mean or look like. Nevertheless, if he does this in place of Christ, then you have no advocate, and surely would rightly die for your sins.

But Satan is angry because he was cast out of heaven by Michael and his angels. He no longer has a place in the heavenly council, but Jesus Christ is in his rightful place, pleading on your behalf on account of his death and resurrection. The accusations would still ring true, but they are rendered false by the victorious Lamb. Your sins are atoned for and covered by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross where He died as the propitiation for the world. As was heard in today's reading,

Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!

Jesus was born to bring peace, a peace which the world cannot give, and through His death and resurrection, then, Jesus brings peace to heaven, and for you to be a part of that peace, His death and resurrection brought you peace with God.

That also helps to create some understanding as to when and most certainly how this war and casting down took place. The war was fought in eternity. Just before today's reading, John wrote that the Child (that is Jesus Christ) was "caught up to God and His throne." (Revelation 12:5) Then, the war broke out, and the serpent and his angels were cast out of heaven. This war is likely not the fall of Lucifer, as may be supposed, but his ultimate defeat as Jesus was crucified, died, rose, and ascended. Dr. Brighton wrote,

As a result of Christ's victory on the cross and his public vindication over the dragon at his ascension and exaltation, there was no longer any room in heaven for the accuser. The dragon *had* to be thrown out of heaven, for Christ's vicarious atonement and justification of the saints made Satan's accusations false—lies—and an offense against God's gracious justice in Christ. Once Christ was elevated and enthroned, the slander was held in contempt of God's court and "was thrown out" (12:9), never again to appear before God's heavenly presence.

Jesus confirmed this, as was heard in today's Gospel reading. When the 70 returned from preparing the way for Jesus, proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom of God wherever they went, Jesus tells them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Jesus' statement also shows that it is His crucifixion and ascension and the proclamation of the same—that is the very Gospel of sins forgiven in the blood of the Lamb—is that which gives Michael the power to cast out Satan and his angels. Satan is cast out as the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed; and this, not only from pulpits around the world, but also as you tell your friends and neighbors the same!

But now, Satan is contained here, on earth, exacting His vengeance on God's creation. The war continues. The battle has spilled out. "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." But fear not,

dear Baptized, for his wrath against you, while great, is short and futile. Remember, His accusations are false. While you have sinned, your sin is covered. You have been made righteous in the blood of the Lamb. You are baptized; you are in Jesus Christ, your advocate before the throne of God. Your names are written in the Lamb's book of Life in heaven, inscribed on those sacred pages in His most precious blood! Now, because the blood of your Savior covers you, the Father looks at you and sees His Son and not the sinner. You are counted righteous because of what the Son has done for you; the accusations of the devil are false. Your salvation is secure!

It is secure because you have died already.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

When the water was poured over you, included in God's command and combined with God's Word, you died. You were drowned there and put on Jesus Christ. Now, it is no longer you who live but Christ who lives in you. (cf. Galatians 2:20) And He who deigns to call you His Son has there written your name in the Lamb's book of Life.

Therefore, you now set your mind on things above, knowing that they will be yours in short order. There, at the Divine Council is where Jesus Christ, flesh like your flesh, intercedes on your behalf, pleading His blood for your sins, as you battle Satan and his minions here below. In this battle, you wield not earthly things, but heavenly. As St. Paul wrote,

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God... (Ephesians 6:12-17)

All of these things are given you from above for the sake of Jesus Christ and His work for you on the cross, in the grave, and now, seated at the right hand of Majesty—given to you by grace and the blood of the Lamb.

It is the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ—the victory over Satan in heaven—that purifies and preserves Christ's Church on earth. It marks your doors. It is your proclamation, your eating and drinking, your rescue from this wicked and perverse generation. It is the opening of the doors to heaven for you.

Michael and his angels won the war in heaven by the blood of the Lamb. Jesus Christ crucified was their strength to overthrow and throw out the devil and his angels. Now, the battle is fought on earth, and the same blood of the Lamb is your strength, you who battle against them here and now. Jesus Christ crucified for you is your strength to overthrow the devil and his angels. It is not your doing, not your work, inasmuch as it was not Michael's work that won the war in heaven. Just like the 72, the devil and all of his demons are subject to you in the name of Jesus. Jesus gives you the victory, in His name, because the war is won already for you.

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us.
We tremble not, we fear no ill,

They shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none,
He's judged; the deed is done;

One little word can fell him. (*A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, stanza 3)

The devil is judged already—scowl fiercely as he may. He can harm you none, because the deed is done. One little word can fell him—one little word has felled him: liar, because his accusations against you are false for the sake of Christ.

What I mean by that, dear hearers, is that the devil has been cast out of heaven. You, even though you are part of the Church Militant, have been placed in the Kingdom of heaven by way of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and your baptism into the same. His accusations against you are baseless on account of Jesus Christ. He's judged already, condemned and expelled, and you are declared not guilty.

Then comes the Last Day. "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." Jesus Christ will return as the saints in the young church saw Him victoriously ascend. On that great and dreadful day, finally and forever, the devil and his angels will be cast into the lake of fire (cf. Revelation 20:10; Jude 6), and you will appear with Him forever in glory.

For the time being, however, the devil wars against you in futility. In futility because you, dear Baptized, are covered in the blood of the Lamb. Rejoice, therefore, that your names are written in heaven. The devil in all of his wrath cannot harm you because of that. Therefore, since your names are written in heaven, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.