

THE FEAST OF SAINT MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS

Text: St. Matthew 18:1-11

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Any and all attempts to compare the kingdoms of this world to the Kingdom of Heaven fall flat because the kingdoms of the world are nothing like the Kingdom of Heaven. The kingdoms of the world, or rather, the kingdoms of men, are subject to sinful men and their distorted view of morality, such that they do not, indeed, cannot, correctly discern right from wrong.

Thus, greatness in the kingdoms of men is weighed differently than greatness is weighed and measured in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the kingdoms of men, might makes right, power is the ultimate authority, with wealth and riches serving as the canon or standard by which one measures influence, prerogative, success, and excess.

In the kingdoms of men, self-seeking, pride, self-promotion, hubris, and arrogance hold sway. There is no real room for compassion or love of neighbor in the kingdoms of men unless there is something to be gained, some benefit, some underlying or hidden agenda. In the kingdoms of men, power and law rule the day.

The Kingdom of Heaven is none of these things. Instead, it is a Kingdom of grace and mercy. It is the Kingdom of the weak and helpless. He who wishes to be first in the Kingdom of Heaven must *first* be *last*, and he who is the *least* is counted the *greatest*. To enter the Kingdom of Heaven, to be its citizen, one must cast off all airs and pretenses, all independence, all self-sufficiency, one must give up his or her struggle to control his or her life—the captain of his or her own ship. In the Kingdom of Heaven, one must become vulnerable, dependent, weak, humble; in short, one must become as a little child.

But what is it to become a little child; just what was it our LORD meant when He called the little child into the disciples' midst? After all, it is not as though a child in and of him or herself has any endearing qualities that make him or her holier than an adult and, therefore, more acceptable to God. Remember what King David wrote in Psalm 51, "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.*"

You see, one is not God-pleasing simply for the fact that one is a child. Even the youngest children are steeped in sin. But they do have one distinguishing characteristic that sets them apart from adults—trust; it is trust that sets little children apart from adults.

It is a child-like faith that everything will turn out alright, that they will be fed and clothed, kept safe and warm, that they are loved and cared for and all their basic needs will be provided for by those who love them. Little children hear and believe, they *trust*, without question.

Therefore, our LORD tells His disciples, *“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

So, it is, that if you would enter the Kingdom of Heaven you must become vulnerable, you must become humble, you must repent and be converted. If you would enter the Kingdom of Heaven you must risk everything on the simple *trust*, the simple *faith*, that God is good and His Word and promises are true, that He loves you and wants to take care of you. Yes, you must have faith.

Indeed, you must have the faith of a little child, and that faith must rest on JESUS CHRIST alone. For no one can be saved apart from faith in JESUS CHRIST. No one enters the Kingdom of Heaven without a vulnerable and dependent trust that risks everything on JESUS’ death and resurrection. No matter papistic encyclicals or pronouncements, no matter the false prophesies of heretics, no matter the fantasies or dreams of men, no one, absolutely no one, enters the Kingdom of Heaven except through our LORD and SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST.

Still, child-like faith does not mean blind faith. No, this faith knows and actively seeks CHRIST, the object of true faith. Thus, child-like faith is not the empty faith you are so often encouraged to cling to. So, it is, that sayings like *“have faith”* or *“keep the faith”* are meaningless unless they mean faith in JESUS CHRIST.

Therefore, to receive the Kingdom of Heaven as a little child is to allow yourself to be given the Kingdom of Heaven just as a child receives the necessities of life from his or her parents, because no one can claim the Kingdom of Heaven by birthright or merit. This means that you receive the Kingdom of Heaven not by right or demand, but by bowing in lowly and humble submission to your LORD, to His divine will, and Word. To receive the Kingdom of Heaven like a child means to learn to say *“Abba”* FATHER; it means that one must, by faith, become a newborn child again.

Indeed, this was JESUS’ message given in the dark of night to the Pharisee, Nicodemus. *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”* One must be born again—one must be converted, or he or she will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven. One must be reborn of water and SPIRIT and return to that rebirth every moment of every single day. In other words, one must repent

and be baptized, and then, remember and return to the promise of one's Baptism each and every day!

Therefore, I say to you, repent! Repent and be free of your self-absorbed desire to be the greatest. Repent, and receive from the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven the fruits of *His* humility. For JESUS, who is the very incarnate SON of God, suffered unspeakable humiliation in order to save you from sin and the grave, to bestow upon you the title, "*Child of God,*" and give to you the Kingdom of Heaven.

Be humbled by faith and JESUS will raise you up, using your very weaknesses, your sufferings, your heartaches, and your pain, all that *you* despise and call evil. For JESUS was despised, spit upon, beaten nearly to death, and finally endured death itself, even the humiliating death of the Cross. The King of kings was put to shame and endured the death of a common criminal. JESUS was nailed to His throne, the Cross, that He might exalt you, raising you up to seat you beside Him in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Such a picture is not one of power and might. It is a picture of weakness and humiliation. Still, JESUS was not powerless. He was not a victim of circumstance or bad luck; nor was it a failure of CHRIST's ministry; it is His ministry. For this reason He was born.

Our LORD veiled His power so that in His humiliation and death, He could destroy death. With such "*weakness*", JESUS defeated Satan, not through the shedding of Satan's blood, but by the shedding of His own innocent Blood, which He chose to pour out for the life of the world. For this, our FATHER in Heaven honors His sacrifice and has raised JESUS from death to life, from weakness to strength, from humiliation to exaltation.

It is this exaltation that JESUS provides to you in the public washing of your sins in Holy Baptism. In this washing you are born again, converted to begin life anew as a child of God in the family of the Church. This is how that Infant, that humble little Child, JESUS, born in a lowly stable so long ago, brings you to His Kingdom. For in that Child, that tiny Infant, JESUS, the Kingdom of Heaven is present, and so the Kingdom is present in you as well, because in Baptism, the CHRIST Child takes up residence in you as the exalted, victorious, crucified, and risen CHRIST of Easter Day, the same CHRIST who now sits on the Throne with our FATHER in Heaven.

Having been baptized, JESUS sends His angels to you, even as we pray as we rise in the morning, and before we close our eyes to rest for the night. JESUS sends you His angels and they become *your* angels, guarding and protecting you from the great dragon who is Satan, the one stronger than you. These are the very same angels who stand continually in the presence of our FATHER and see His face. They are the same angels, who with St. Michael, whose name means "*he who is like God*" drove Satan and his

demons from heaven. Satan, who exalted himself before God, is cast down. Now there is no one left to accuse you, for only your angels and your Advocate, JESUS, stand before the face of God.

Your angels drove Satan from heaven with the Blood of the Lamb. That very same Blood is given to you to guard you from Satan, sin, and the grave. For this is the Blood of that humble little CHRIST Child who was raised up on a Cross to draw all people to Himself, the same Little One who has ascended to Heaven to be seated at the right hand of God. It is His Blood poured out for you that you receive from this humble Chalice. It is by His Blood that you have overcome our old evil foe.

“Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” The Little One who was humbled to be born of a Virgin; who lived a life of poverty; who died by crucifixion; was raised on the third day, and ascended into heaven. This Little One will return soon and call all His little ones to Him. Do not fear, but listen for the voice of our LORD. He is calling to you that He might hold you in the midst of the Kingdom of Heaven. Even now you have heard His voice as He calls, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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