

May the words of my lips and the mediations of our heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen

Please be seated.

(Pause)

There is a piece of music written and sung by Bill and Gloria Gaither titled "It Is Finished". Now, some of you may recall my mention of this piece when I spoke on Good Friday back in the late Spring of this year. I have listened to this piece of music for nearly 40 years of my adult life, ever since I had the opportunity to hear the Gaithers' in person, in Stratford Ontario. This piece is poetry set to music. It is about the battle which rages within each of us between the powers of evil in this world, and the love of Our Creator. This battle has been part of the journey for every person, of faith born throughout all time. It is a battle which was won on the cross on a forsaken hill called Golgotha, some two thousand years ago, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But, for many of us who claim Jesus as our Redeemer, this battle continues to rage on within our own hearts because we have not realized the battle is over. The battle has been won. Yet we are not alone in our struggle with the

evil of this world, the forces of God's angels continue to be our guides, protectors and our companions.

In all three of our scripture readings for today, there is included a reference to angels. For me, the mention of angels brings to mind how I envisioned an angel appearing, back in the days when I was a child. I remember attending Sunday School and seeing a poster-sized image of an angel, an angel in a long flowing white robe and with two sets of wings, surrounded by a heavenly scene of clouds, and all of this wrapped in a aura of peace and serenity. Has anyone shared this image, or is this image wholly my own? (Pause) In many of our places of worship, we have beautiful stained glass windows celebrating Michael, the archangel. And with St. Michael, are the legions of angels who sing God's praises around the throne of The Almighty and who do The Creator's bidding.

Angels in the Bible are given three job descriptions. First and foremost, the word "angel" means "messenger." They deliver God's message. The second task of angels is to be avengers. In the book of Revelation "Michael and his angels" defeat Satan and all the demons of Hell. The third role for angels is to be "guardians" of all Creation.

In Psalm 103, the psalmist states: “you mighty ones who do his bidding and hearken to the voice of his word.” Even in the psalms, the psalmists knew the place which the angels of heaven held in God’s dominion.

On this Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, we are presented with an image of legions of guardian angels attending the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. And again, we have a second image of angels doing God's bidding on Earth as messengers. And finally, they act as avenging angels, fighting against the powers of the Evil One, fighting for supremacy in Heaven. Yet, we have little or no empirical evidence that angels really exist. That leads me to ask a question. Do we need empirical evidence of their existence, or can I believe by faith alone?

Let's look at the role of God’s angels in each of today’s readings from Holy Scripture.

In The Book of Revelation, we read the account of how Heaven was rocked by division within the company of angels. There were two camps, those loyal to God, and those who thought that they were equal to God.

But God is the only supreme being. And angels are one of God's creations and therefore not equal to God. It is difficult to comprehend

how Heaven itself could be rocked by a war, a war that was not of human making. Rather, a war of supernatural proportions, a cosmic war in which the forces of good battled against the forces of the Evil One. Today, we celebrate the victory of St. Michael and All the Angels who triumphed over the angels who followed Satan and were banished to eternal existence in Hell. From my childhood, I remember another of those Sunday School posters, one depicting a victorious St. Michael, the avenging arc angel, offering praise to God, following the battle for Heaven. Yet, this battle continues today within our hearts here on Earth. Every day, every day we struggle with the forces of evil and good in our own lives. In the last days, there will be one final battle between the powers of evil and the angels of heaven. And the Bible tells us that Satan will be defeated and cast into the eternal abyss, forever more. (Pause)

In the reading from Genesis which shared with us, we hear about the wanderings of Jacob in the desert. Through deceit and trickery, Jacob stole his family's inheritance from his brother Esau. In anger, Esau threatened Jacob's life, so Jacob fled into the desert, to a place that Jacob believed even God had forgotten. After a long day of struggle, Jacob rested and as darkness fell, he took a stone for a pillow, and he went to sleep. I know for myself, if I don't have a good

pillow to sleep on, I usually end up having a fit-full night. That's exactly what happened to Jacob. As he slept, he dreamt. And in his dreams, he saw a ladder coming down Heaven and reaching to the Earth. Now, whether it was a ladder, or a staircase, really does not matter. The point is this, the stairway to heaven was not to give Jacob a way to reach heaven. Instead, God spoke to Jacob where he was, revealing God's presence with Jacob in that place. This encounter is completely driven by God – and Jacob was never not in a position of being in control. God breaks into Jacob's sleep and provides Jacob with a vision of God's kingdom, and plan for Jacob's life.

When Jacob awoke, he built an altar in that place, and it became a sacred place for the Hebrew people called Bethel.

So, in both the reading from Genesis and Revelations, angels are agents of God. Warriors for the Kingdom and ministers to God's Creation. But we have one more reading - the Gospel reading from John. Here we find Jesus, meeting Nathaniel who was sitting under a fig tree. Jesus understood Nathaniel's thoughts before Nathaniel could speak. Jesus told Nathaniel that he would witness much greater things in Nathaniel's journey of faith to that point. Things far beyond

just hearing the words spoken to him by Jesus. Did you know that Jesus' words speak to all of us, even today? "Very truly, I tell you, you (referring to all humankind), 'you' will see Heaven opened and the guardian angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man". This verse brings to fulfillment the invitation and promise of the first words in the Gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one came into being." These are words for all to hear. Let me repeat what John wrote, "Very truly, I tell you (plural), you (you being the plural "you") will see the heavens open, and the (guardian angels) of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man". This is God's promise of his unwavering presence and care for us all!

Today, Jesus is our connection to God. Jesus is the Son of God who was lifted up on the cross to redeem all humankind for all eternity. The cross is the new "Bethel", the place where Christ completes the work of salvation for all who profess faith in the Creator. In each of our readings for this morning, angels are present, ministering to the Son of Man and to God's gift of Creation and to the One who sits on the Throne, Our Creator, the One we know as God. We give thanks for the wonder of Creation, for the sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ

on the cross, and for the love of God for all believers. Today, we celebrate the Feast of St. Michael and All the Angels, but we also celebrate Orange Shirt Day to remember the struggles of our indigenous sisters and brothers to be recognized as God's children in their own right. It has been said that there are many paths to The Creator, but there is only one Creator for all Creation. We recognize that we share with the indigenous peoples a belief in the Creator. Today, we recognize their continued struggle to be a people, a people of the land, the water and all creation. A people born of the Creator, a people of God.

In the resurrection, Jesus has won victory for every child of the Creator. The battle for the redemption of all humankind has been won, and God has seen that it is indeed good. That means that we do not need empirical evidence of the existence of angels. Nor do we need empirical evidence of God's love for all Creation. Today, we raise our voices in praise on this Feast of St. Michael and All Angels knowing that all creation, all believers, and all the angels of heaven are joining in our celebration.

Thanks be to God. It is indeed finished. Amen