

Lord Jesus, we give thanks that You *through the strength of Your Archangel, Michael, have driven permanently the old dragon from the courts of heaven with all his ugly accusations against us.* And because You have purchased us with Your holy blood, keep us Your own, and suffer not the enemy to seduce our hearts. Let Your *holy angels continue to war against those who seek our souls, and drive them far away from us.* Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, CPH, Ps. 35, p. 88)

[Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He said this plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." And calling the crowd to Him with His disciples, He said to them, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And He said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

In Christ Jesus, who promises to return with all His holy angels to take us, bodies and souls, to our eternal home, dear fellow redeemed:

How shocked do you think Peter was when Jesus addressed him specifically and said: "Get behind Me, Satan!"? No doubt all the disciples were quite shocked, since this followed almost immediately upon Jesus commending Peter for his great confession when he declared to Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." How could someone so right, all of a sudden be so wrong?

As Christians we know how vulnerable we are to the demonic forces that plague us constantly, but we also know that our Lord continues to be present among us forgiving us, giving us life and saving us. Also for our comfort we can observe this from our text: **Vexed by Demonic Forces, Angels Always Attend Christ's Church.**

I

As much as we are overwhelmed with challenges in this life from other people, those close to us, our peers, those in superior roles over us, or those over whom we have responsibilities, there is an entire spiritual realm that challenges us even more. The Apostle Paul writing to the Christians in Ephesus says it this way: "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."

Satan loves to distract us, so that we find our enemies among our fellow human beings almost dismissing his wicked influence in our lives. When you think of it, his many harmful lies are held by many a Christian, thinking they are actually good, kind and benevolent. One his more popular and yet perverse lies today is the basis of so many others: *"Before you can love neighbor as yourself, you have to work on loving yourself."*

In regard to the 3rd Commandment Satan and his allies trick us by saying *"You are not saved by going to church, so it is not all that necessary."*; re: 4th Commandment: *"You need to be self assertive and thereby you can and even should rebel against authority."*; re: 5th Commandment: *"Your anger is justified, so speaking hurtful words is a fair form of punishing retaliation."*; re: 6th Commandment: *"Having sexual relationships outside marriage of one man and one woman is an okay form of expression, if true love is in the relationship."*; re: 7th Commandment: *"The property of the rich needs to be shared with the rest of us who are much closer to poverty; so if we can find a way to take it from them, we should."*; re: 8th Commandment: *"If someone is suspected of wrongdoing and he refuses to answer questions about it, he should be judged guilty, even without a trial."*

It seemed right and proper, and downright kind of Peter to rebuke Jesus and tell Him that the predicted suffering, rejection and execution upon a cross should never happen to Him. But Jesus informed Peter that all such reasoning came from the pit of hell. While of course we also do not like hearing all that our Lord had to endure, this was the plan of God to save us. God's plan was the effective plan. Man's plans never work no matter how reasonable they may sound. Frankly, my fellow Christians, even though by God's grace we know and confess God's plan of salvation for us through His crucified and risen Son, we constantly dabble in the plans endorsed by Satan, which only lead to hell.

You at times think you can make up for your sins with your good deeds. You at times think by comparing yourself to other sinners you will be found more acceptable by God. You at times think since you try hard to do what God demands, He will acknowledge your efforts as being sufficient to welcome you into the courts of heaven. Every time you catch yourself thinking along these demonic lines – hear Jesus saying: *"Get behind him/her, Satan!"* – in

other words: *"Take your damn lies back to hell with you! Leave my little ones alone."*

II

What Peter was suggesting through his rebuke of Jesus was what Jesus would soon experience by the vexation of Satan in the Garden as He faced drinking the awful cup of His Father's bitter wrath toward all our sin. Jesus did not succumb to the temptations, yet He was in severe agony, so much so that a holy angel was sent to comfort Him through the ordeal of facing our eternal punishment when the Father would forsake Him. These holy magnificent creatures were created to serve the believing human race, Jesus being no exception, since the very Son of God was made man.

The angels' roles among the human race can be seen in the joyous announcements to Abraham that his aged wife Sarah would give birth to a son; in the personal warning to Lot and his family in Sodom; in that sacred chamber of the Virgin nine months before Jesus' birth; out in the fields of Bethlehem; at the empty tomb; and on the Mount of Ascension. Based on the accounts of the beggar Lazarus, we anticipate that the holy angels will attend to our souls upon death lovingly transporting them to heaven. We learn from our text, they will be there on the great and awe-filled day of the resurrection of all the dead when our bodies will be raised in glory standing as the righteous at Jesus' right hand for the judgment.

The angels were there in Jacob's dream ascending and descending upon the stairway to heaven bearing the messages of peace and blessing. They were there as chariots of fire protecting Elisha and his servant Gahazi from the surrounding Syrian army. They rescued Peter from prison delivering him unharmed to where the Christians were meeting praying for him. The holy angels are here among us today watching us while beholding the face of the heavenly Father at all times prepared to intervene at the Father's commanding nod.

Jesus concludes our text by saying: "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." This is in reference to what we have recorded for us in Revelation 12, the Epistle for St. Michaels. It recounts the powerful driving of Satan from before God on Good Friday with all of his true but ugly accusations against us. Sadly, there was one who would taste death before that happened, the son of perdition, Judas, the greedy betrayer, who loved money more than God. All those accusations were borne by our Savior upon the cross, which Peter did not want Jesus to endure. The sins of even

Judas were borne by our Lord, but without faith he was damned to hell with Satan. Judas' god of money had no power to save as Satan tricked him to believe. But you my fellow believers in Christ are thoroughly cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. Your sins of falling for Satan's lies are all forgiven through that holy precious blood.

The spiritual struggle that wages even now for your very souls is real and fierce. God is for you in Christ, who can be against you? Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ and His holy army of angels stands at the ready to serve you in this great battle between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of Christ. Rest easy, my fellow redeemed, not in your sin, but in the love of God for you in His Son who bore the punishment for all your sins. Crave the word of Christ that it may dwell in you richly, so the damning lies of Satan do not deceive you. By this Word, you are blessed having your mind set on the things of God forevermore. Amen.