

ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS

Candlemas, Midnight Mass, Michaelmas, Requiem Mass:

They all represent different people and different occasions: past, present and future, centred around the altars of the world, each representing sacrifice and celebration. They are not optional feasts but rather, sacred 'spots of time,' which draw us into the imagination, wonder, and glory of our God. This is the God of all creation, the God of heaven and earth.

What better place to begin today's story than in the book of Genesis? Jacob dreamed "that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."

That vision suddenly came alive when the Lord stood beside him and said, 'I am the Lord...Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.' And with that revelation and truth comes the proclamation as Jacob woke from sleep: '**Surely** the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it.' And then we hear the words often inscribed on many a lychgate up and down the land: This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

So not only at Michaelmas but at every mass, we are a very part of that place where God resides, where we celebrate His presence among us and yes, where earth is joined with heaven: as a ladder, a meeting point, an encounter that turns all our lives upside down in a healing way and a transformative way.

Isn't this why we sing the Gloria week in and week out or why, in a different context, Abba could make famous that beautiful song by Cristy Lane: 'I believe in Angels...something good in everything I see'?

Michael, Gabriel and Raphael are the three named biblical angels, depicted as the beloved messengers of God. Michael, which means 'who is like God?', is described as protector of Israel and leader of the armies of God and is perhaps best known for his victory over the dragon, something portrayed not only in the Revelation to John the divine – but also here, in stone, above the north porch as you enter St Mary's. It is often missed by people; I always point it out to children from our schools because, like me, they love the dragon! What perhaps they do not need to know yet is that the dragon represent the devil, represents evil.

Michael defiantly protects us all, though, to pursue instead the power of God's goodness and grace, and not only as we enter the house of God. It is our common vocation to trample on all the wiles and wickedness (of those whom the English historian, Lord Acton, referred to): "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

The angels of God then are kept very busy in today's world - where the love, compassion, and justice of God is ignored or rejected. They are kept very busy in reminding and encouraging us to build Christian communities of faith which understands that the cross of Calvary is the most liberating example of trampling evil and destruction. Christ's own

sacrifice is something we recall in every Eucharistic prayer, the sacrifice which leads us all to the glory of heaven and the life to come. I shall never forget the words of former churchwarden and poet, T S Eliot, when he said in that final section of 'Little Gidding': "What we call the beginning is often the end and to make an end is to make a beginning."

Christ **has** conquered death and **has** conquered evil, so that's why we should also be marking St Michael's praise today as an inspiring servant and messenger of that great truth. The inevitability of death leads to the promise of resurrection, the crossing from darkness to light. Michael is usually envisaged then as the leader of the heavenly host, and sometimes as receiver of the souls of the departed to which the famous spiritual song refers: 'Michael, row the boat ashore! Alleluia!' Wouldn't that be a good tune to hear played when our coffin is taken out of church after one's requiem mass literally sends us out? That's the original meaning of the word 'mass' – dismissal, letting go and living the life of the resurrection.

I wasn't very good last week with the Latin names of plants and trees! But I do remember these words, *Ite missa est* which concludes every Eucharist: 'Go, the prayer has been sent.'

Glory be....

AMEN.