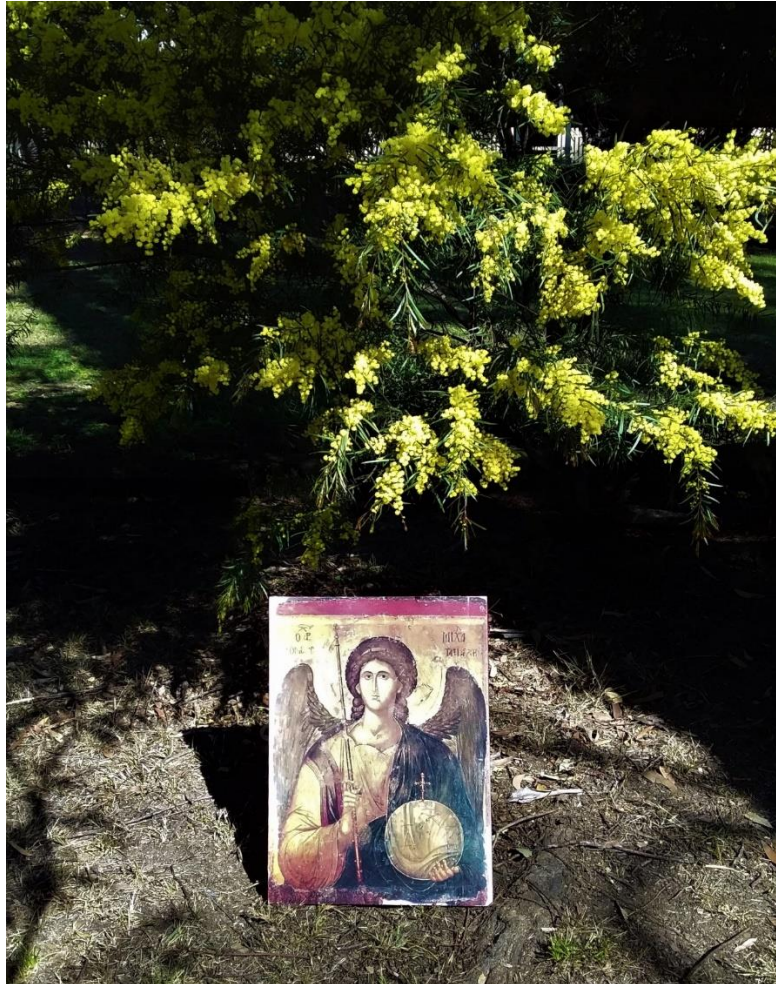


The Love of God Prevails



On September 29, we Sisters celebrate the feast of Michael, the archangel, our patron. We are encouraged by the example of the angels to embrace a life in which the worship of God and active ministry to others merge together in love.

Recently in Australia, as the photo above suggests, we have experienced a lengthy drought, prolonged bushfires and now face the coronavirus pandemic with its subsequent suffering from the illness, imposed restrictions and an end that keeps disappearing. And yet, God's love for the world continues to prevail, surrounding and permeating all. Can a reflection on this picture give us hope today, in our grief and anxieties?

We believe God is ultimately in control of our world, although in the present situation this can seem questionable. We might well ask, "Has God abandoned us, or lost control of our lives, country and world?"

Sometimes we may feel a bit like the three friends of Daniel in Daniel chapter 3, but perhaps a little less optimistic! When threatened by King Nebuchadnezzar with death in a raging fire if they refused to worship his golden statue, they replied that the God they served could save them, but even if he did not, they would not worship any other gods. They believed that God was in control of all and *could* save them, but they did not presume that God *would*. They were prepared to accept whatever happened to them. What happened is that they were indeed thrown into the fire, but were saved from burning, and another joined them.

The photograph on this leaflet depicts an icon of Michael, the archangel, in front of a flowering wattle tree. The black background and bare earth suggest something of how the past year has panned out for many people. The yellow blossom and the icon of Michael stand out as a burst of new life against their stark setting.

The story concerning Michael in Revelation 12:7-12 is of a war in heaven where good defeats evil but does not destroy it. In the life of Jesus as recounted in the gospels, there is suffering and death but also resurrection and new life. Again, suffering and evil are not annihilated, but God's love is shown as in control and more powerful.

For those who believe in God and for Christ's followers, there was and is no guaranteed avoidance of suffering, but there can certainly be spiritual and emotional growth in the midst of it and through it. Our suffering can arise from many directions such as the acts of other people, the weakness of our bodies, or as a consequence of something we have done, but from wherever it might come, I believe that God is with us in it and can use it for good.

Returning to the story of Daniel's three friends, they endured the terror of being tied up and thrown into the fire, yet they were not burnt, and later their clothes did not even smell of smoke. In this ordeal they found that God did not abandon them but was in the fire with them, saving

them and overturning King Nebuchadnezzar's plan for them.

Michael in the icon is depicted holding the world God created and controls. Above the world is the sign of the cross of Christ, a symbol of the great love of God which is continually with us sharing our pain and suffering.

When struggling with our anxieties, we can discover love and compassion, perhaps from unexpected sources. We may find that God uses nature to lift us up by showing us something beautiful if we are open to see it. Wattle, with its vivid flowers appearing towards the end of winter, can brighten our backyards, car parks and the empty or barren places in our lives. Sometimes it might be strangers who offer us love and concern when we are gripped by darkness or grief. Animals are also able to sense our feelings and comfort us.

Michael's name means "Who is like God?" It is the archangel's cry to all who would want to worship another god, be it money, power, possessions or themselves. On the other hand, his challenge can be understood as ambiguous, reminding us also to keep following or being *like* Christ, accepting our suffering and allowing God to use it so that we can better share God's love with others.

As God used the loving life and death of Jesus to bring new life to all, God uses our acts of love and kindness, along with our suffering, failures and even evil, redeeming and gathering them all up in God's great plan of salvation. This action of God does not encourage us to deliberately seek suffering; rather, it strengthens our belief that even though we do not understand how or why it happens, in the end God's love always prevails over and through all else.

Trusting that God is in control of all life gives us hope, as we journey on with Christ towards full life in God's love for ever.

*Sister Helen CSC
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