

All Saints—Michaelmas 25.9.22

Today we are celebrating Michael and All Angels as you will know. I am preaching because our Community of the Sisters of the Church, has Michael the Archangel as patron. It may seem odd to have an angel as a patron, but although angels are not human beings, they can be examples to us of lives in which adoration of God and action are merged.

The word 'angel', means 'messenger', and witnesses to the fact that in the Bible angels are said to take messages from God to humans. But Angels are not just messengers. When we look at the name Michael, it means, "Who is like God?" We, although made in the image of God are not God, and are challenged to always see ourselves and others as needing God's help and guidance to follow Christ and reveal something of God's love in our world.

In the reading from the book of Revelation, we heard a story of a struggle between good and evil. We may at some time have wondered why a God of love who created us and cares about us, allows suffering, pain and evil to be part of our world. For example, recently we heard that in Ukraine about 450 bodies of civilians and tortured soldiers were unearthed when a village was freed from Russian control by the Ukrainian forces. That was a horrible atrocity, a war crime, which hurt those involved and the whole world.

We also know about our own experiences of pain and suffering and the suffering of members of our family and friends. If we think about it, we can recall times when we have hurt others by our words and actions. We might ask ourselves, how can we and others do such things to our brothers, sisters and the neighbours we are called to love?

The story of Michael fighting against Satan, (a word meaning adversary or accuser), explains the presence of evil on earth by suggesting that evil was first brought into heaven by a fallen angel and his companions. Michael fought against this angel, dragon or Satan, and was victorious. Satan was then, with his followers, cast out of heaven, down to earth.

Although Michael won the battle, and the power of Satan and his angels was defeated, they were not killed. On earth, we are told, the final victory over evil has been won by Christ through his death on the cross and the power of God in his resurrection. This triumph is alluded to in our passage when it says, "our comrades" - the martyrs, "who did not cling to life even in the face of death," - conquered Satan/evil, "by the blood of the Lamb". In other words, by Christ's victory on the cross. We, everyone in earth and heaven, are therefore urged to rejoice.

We probably know this story, and we also know that evil exists in our lives and in our world. We have all experienced temptation, and struggled to do good and say the right words, but have sometimes failed. The examples of others, stories we hear and the support of our family or friends can all help us. This help is important because what we do and say can affect others and the way we do or do not reveal God's love.

The other day I heard a story about Roger Federer, the tennis player, who has just retired

from top-grade tennis. People said what a fine example he was on the court and a model for young players. But one person commented that this was not always true. As a teenager Roger often threw tantrums on the court. One day his parents told him that they were no longer going to watch him play. He asked, "Why?" They replied that they did not want to keep seeing him throw tantrums. After that Roger changed. His behaviour became a good example for others. He still had to struggle at times to control himself and occasionally said the odd words that were not helpful, but has usually succeeded in controlling what he did.

We have also seen on television how King Charles III, in the stress of his grief, publicly showed his frustration with a pen that leaked.

To control a quick hurtful response that expresses our annoyance, can take some effort, especially if we are feeling tired or neglected. It can also upset others. Perhaps it can help in these situations, for us to try and think of how another might be feeling, or to see things from the perspective of someone else. We might also remember that everyone, along with us, are loved by God and made in God's image. Consequently we are also to love others and not hurt them. We shall not always succeed in conquering our temper, but if we fail, we can always say sorry and try again.

Uncle Jack Charles, who recently died, was an Aboriginal member of the Stolen Generation, abused as a child in institutions and foster care, he stole and ended up in jail. There he decided to change his life's direction, and help others who were also in jail, to change their lives. Because of his own experiences, he felt able to speak to and assist those who had endured pain and suffering similar to his own.

He became an acclaimed actor, but more importantly he became a mentor for others by showing love for, and acceptance of, all people.

When we talk about loving God and loving others, it only has reality and quality when we open ourselves to allow God to work in us, through us and with us. The basic identification of God is love, and it seems, in my life anyway, that this love mostly grows when I journey through times of struggle and difficulty. It seems that God uses something that is hard and even evil to produce good. When we think of Jesus' life, he entered our world and shared our suffering. In the end he was nailed to a cross, unable to move physically, help others or himself, and died in great pain. Yet through that suffering and in his resurrection he witnessed to God's love triumphing and gave us the hope of eternal life with God.

Angels, we believe, are Divine Beings created by God. Although the story about Michael's battle with Satan was probably told just to explain the presence of evil and suffering in the lives of God's loved creation, it also reveals the truth of God's power of love over evil.

We can be encouraged by Michael's defeat of evil and faithfulness in worshipping and serving God, to ask for God's help to keep following Christ and serving others. By so doing we shall grow in God's love as we care about others, give thanks for them and pray for

them.

When things are really hard in our lives and we feel weak, we can be confident that God is with us and holding us. God's love will eventually triumph over all evil, pain and suffering-in us, others and the world.

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25.9.22