

Saint Michael the Archangel Defend Us In Battle

Yesterday, September 29th was the feast of three archangels—Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. First a little gloss on angels and archangels from Pope Gregory the Great, who said: “You should be aware that the word ‘angel’ denotes a function rather than a nature—something a spirit does rather than something a spirit is. Those spirits of heaven have indeed always been spirits. They can only be called angels when they deliver some message from God. Moreover those who deliver messages of lesser importance are called angels; and those who proclaim messages of supreme importance are called archangels.”

This morning I want to focus my attention on Saint Michael the Archangel specifically. Whenever some act of wondrous power must be performed Michael is sent, so that his action and his name may make it clear that no one can do what God does by his superior Power. In the Scriptures Michael is mentioned several times by name. In the Book of Daniel chapter 12 we read, *“At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book (of Life). Many of those who have already died will live again; some will enjoy eternal life, and some will suffer eternal disgrace. The wise leaders shall shine with all the brightness of the sky. And those who have taught many people to do what is right will shine like the stars forever. He said to me, ‘And now Daniel close the book and put a seal on it until the end of the world.’”*

And in the Book of Revelation formerly known as The Apocalypse: We read also in chapter 12: *“War broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back BUT they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it. Then I heard a loud voice, in heaven, say: Now have salvation and power come, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed. For the accuser of our brothers is cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night. They conquered him by the Blood of the Lamb and by the Word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death. Therefore rejoice you heavens and you that dwell therein.”*

In 1886 Pope Leo XIII wrote a series of prayers one of which was to Saint Michael the Archangel. The Pope then directed that it be prayed at the end of every daily Mass all around the world. And it was, for many years. After the Second Vatican Council it was removed but not forgotten. Not much is known for certain about the origin of this prayer, but it is believed by many historians that Pope Leo had a profound vision that sparked its creation.

According to Kevin Symonds, author of *Pope Leo XIII and the Prayer to St. Michael*, the vision likely occurred between 1884 and 1886 and took place during the celebration of Mass. Several different reports relate that Pope Leo had a visible change come over his face during the vision and one claims that his face was “pale and fearful.” A cardinal at the time who knew the pope’s private secretary explains that “Pope Leo XIII truly had a vision of demonic spirits, who were gathering on the Eternal City (Rome). From that experience ... comes the prayer which he wanted the whole Church to recite.”

Whatever happened during Pope Leo’s vision, it appears certain that he did have a vision and what he saw was not pleasant. It prompted him quickly to compose the Prayer to St. Michael, and to request its use at the end of Daily Masses. The pope lived during particularly turbulent times, and he believed prayer was needed to dispel the darkness that hung over the world.

This is the prayer.

***Saint Michael Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil; may God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl through the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.***

We have been praying this prayer here at Saint Anthony's after each daily Mass for a number of years now. We have been asked by our bishop, Charles Chaput, to pray it at the end of every Sunday Mass as well for the protection and the healing of our Church and so we begin today. It has actually been suggested that Satan is exposing the sins of men in order to discourage the faithful. But the Prince of Lies exposes nothing. He has long been the cover-up artist. The Holy Spirit does the revealing: "For nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad" (Luke 8:17). The Truth brings all to light and sets us free—not the evil one. And Saint Michael has already defeated the evil one with the power of the Jesus Christ the Blood of the Lamb. We must be courageous and hopeful and convicted because the war is over. It is just for us now to triumph in the particular battles that still rage unchecked. "Divisions are the handiest weapon for the devil to destroy the Church from within," said the Pope two years ago. There sure are a lot of them around today. Let us resolve not to participate in these divisions and seek always to pray for the triumph of the uniting power of the Holy Spirit and the protection of Saint Michael the Archangel.

My friends, this may seem all very pious. Not to me. To me it is most serious. It involves salvation and eternal life—for everyone.