

Today's first reading introduces us to Michael, the great prince, the guardian of your people. We refer to him as Saint Michael the Archangel, the prince of the heavenly host, who, along with his army of angels defends us in our battle against the devil and his minions. We can always go directly to Jesus for help in all matters, but if he didn't want the saints and angels to help us, why did he give them to us?

Not-so-funny thing about the Saint Michael prayer we pray after every Mass. When I first got here, some of you told me you didn't like that prayer and wanted us to stop praying it. Apparently that prayer is "mean and insensitive." Do you know what scripture says about the devil? Jesus calls him "the enemy, the evil one, the father of lies, a murderer." Saint Peter says "Be sober and vigilant. Your enemy the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." That doesn't sound like someone we should be hanging around with, yet some people want to treat the devil like a lost little boy who just needs a friend. The devil doesn't want us in hell with him because he is lonely and wants our friendship. He hates us and he wants us to be eternally separated from God, which is what hell is.

The Saint Michael prayer was composed by Pope Leo XIII in 1884 after he saw a vision of the devil threatening to destroy the Church. After celebrating Mass, Pope Leo stopped at the altar and saw a vision of Satan and God. Satan told God that he could destroy the Church in 75–100 years if he had more power and influence. Leo also saw demons prowling around the world looking for souls to destroy. We need Saint Michael's help now more than ever.

Saint Michael is a very important figure in spiritual warfare. This topic has come up quite a bit lately so I thought it might be good to do a little review. Like it or not, that's part of my job. Periodically, we have to do this.

First, we need to remember that the devil is real; Jesus himself speaks of him that way. Jesus drove out demons and gave his disciples the power to do the same. Fr Gabriele Amorth, a well-respected exorcist from Rome, wrote that "By taking away the existence of the devil, we destroy redemption; he who does not believe in demons does not believe in the Gospel." Strong and disturbing words, but this guy knows what he's talking about. I personally know priests who have helped with exorcisms and they will testify with their hands on the Bible that this stuff is real.

Jesus acknowledges the reality of the devil, but the devil is not Jesus' rival. Jesus is God incarnate; he has no rival; he cannot be defeated. The devil and the demons are creatures, powerful creatures, but still just creatures and

they only have as much power as God allows them to have. The devil hates God but he cannot hurt God, so he attacks those whom God loves, which is us. God has his own reasons for allowing the devil to work—one of which might be that God uses the devil to scare us back into the protecting arms of Jesus.

We have all heard of demonic possession and curses, those types of things, but do you know how the devil usually attacks us? He tempts us. All of us experience temptation and we usually don't make the devil's job very hard. He just dangles something in front of us and we give in. He doesn't have to resort to extraordinary attacks because we give in so easily to his ordinary attacks. Building up our willpower and resisting temptation are very important parts of our daily battle in the spiritual war going on around us.

There are many well-documented cases of more extraordinary demonic attacks—possession, curses, etc. There needs to be an entry point for demons to do this. Any time we choose evil, we open a door. Anytime we mess around with the occult, we open a door. Curses usually come from a person calling on the power of the devil to attack their enemies. We need to take this stuff seriously without falling into paranoia and superstition. Stay away from anything having to do with the occult, even games, and avoid choosing evil, even so-called lesser evils—there are usually good or neutral alternative opinions but we fail to look for them.

Scary stuff so far. One of the priests I referred to told me about an exorcism he was present at. He said that the possessed person did the creepy head turn thing like in the movies, saw the assisting priests standing there and began to curse. The demon said, "That 'bleep' is here. You have no idea how well protected you are. If that 'bleep' wasn't here, I could snap you in two." Who was the 'bleep' that so enraged the demon? Our blessed mother. She was there protecting the priests and everyone else in the room. Saint Joseph, Saint Benedict, Saint Michael, our guardian angels and many other saints are constantly protecting us. Jesus himself is our greatest protector. As long as we stay with them, we have nothing to fear.

How do we stay with our protectors? God has given us everything we need. The best defense against the demonic is to stay firmly rooted in the sacraments. Go to confession frequently, especially if you are aware of being in the state of mortal sin—mortal sin increases your danger. Go to Mass every Sunday and Holy Days of obligation and receive the Eucharist as often as you can while in a state of grace. Take advantage of sacramentals such as high octane holy water—this is water that has been blessed and exorcized and has

had blessed and exorcized salt added to it; that is what is in all of our holy water fonts and is in the big metal container. We can also use blessed crucifixes and medals. Ask Mary, Joseph, St Michael, and your personal guardian angel to protect you. Above all, when in danger, do the easiest thing possible: call upon the name of Jesus. It is his body and blood that protects us and saves us. We must be careful and vigilant, but with Jesus on our side, we never need to be afraid.

St Michael and all holy angels and saints in heaven, pray for us.