

Homily for St Michael and All Angels, 2020

1 Peter 1:10-12

'Things into which angels long to look'

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TEXT

1 Peter 1:10-12 - Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, ¹¹inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!

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INTRODUCTION

Angels are awesome creatures.

Across cultures and religious traditions people have always had a sense that there is more to this world than only what we see,
And so there has always been an abiding interest and intrigue in angels.

The Scriptures reveal to us this instinct is correct,
That there is this mysterious aspect of God's unseen created world,

Angels, archangels,
Cherubim, seraphim,

Beings of a higher order than us not limited by space and granted great powers by God,

Angels are awesome creatures,
And we rightly are in awe of them and their place in God's creation.

But the wonderful mystery we have revealed to us about the angels today in particular,

Is that although we are in awe of them,

They, in act, are in awe of what God has done for us.

The salvation of God's grace to us in Christ Jesus,

These are the things into which angels long to look.

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ENCOURAGEMENT IN SUFFERING

Our text is taken from the first letter of Peter.

Peter's letter is written to the Christians in the early Church who were doing it tough,

Persecution had already broken out and they were suffering.

If you read through the whole letter of Peter you get these repeated reference to the suffering they are enduring and the fiery trials they're undergoing.

There's also a sense in this they these young Christian communities are people of low status in the eyes of the world,

They don't have much power,

They are little and weak,

From a world point of view.

Perhaps this is how we sometimes feel as individuals or as a community in different ways?

And so in this context how does St Peter encourage them and attempt to lift their spirits?

Well, very simply,

By impressing more firmly upon their hearts and minds the wonder of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

He wants to encourage them by emphasizing the value of what they have as Christians,

He speaks of the salvation of their souls,

Which he also calls the grace which is yours,

And this comes from the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories,

Presumably of his resurrection and ascension,

All of this is the good news, the Gospel,

Which has been brought to you by the Holy Spirit from heaven,

Peter says the very prophets who foretold of these things,

They themselves wanted to know more about it,

And you have it!

The logic is the same as Jesus says elsewhere,

"But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it". Matthew 13:16,17

Blessed are you new testament baptized believers,

In your suffering and trials,
In the struggles of your life,
Know that you have something so valuable that those long ago longed to get just a glimpse of the fullness of this salvation,
And you have it!

And if you still don't see how wonderful it is,
What you have as a Christians person,

St Peter says you know what,

Even the angels of heaven long to look into these things,

Their deepest and strongest desire is to plumb the depths of what God has done for you in Christ Jesus.

Now what does this add here?

Why mention the longing of the angels?

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ILLUSTRATION OF ANGELIC INTEREST

Well, here's one way to think about it.

I want you to imagine a hero of yours,
Someone famous you'd really love to meet,
Or to have met.

Perhaps it's a famous sportsperson or musician or world leader.

Now imagine, if you were able to meet this person,
What you would assume you'd talk about,

What would you like to have a conversation about with this person?

Perhaps what it's like for them performing on the world stage?
Perhaps all the interesting people they've met and what they're like?
Perhaps the ins and outs of how they succeeded so well in what they did in life?

But now imagine you met that person,
And in conversation it turned out that although they were very famous,
They actually didn't have a lot of close friends.

And they noticed that you had some close friends,

And all this famous person, your hero,
All they wanted to talk about was what it was like to have close friends,
To have people you can just drop over any time and relax with,
To have mates,

You even keep trying to change the subject back to what you consider more interesting things,

But they keep coming back to this theme,

Tell me more about that friendship,

And what about this part of it,

And that,

And just tell me again about those friendships.

And now here's the heart of the illustration,

How would this affect the way you value your friendships?

If you took them for granted or even neglected them before,

I dare say after your famous hero took such an interest in them,
You'd begin to value them more highly.

And St Peter is saying something like that about the angels and what we have in Christ Jesus.

We can imagine that the angels have some access to all sorts of wonders of the universe,

The intricacies of the solar systems and galaxies,

The way in which our planet and life on it has developed and changed over the ages,

The wisdom of God in how he has ordered all things and sustains his creation,

All this and so much more could be the focus of their inquiry,

And yet what they long ad desire to look more deeply into,

Is the work of Christ and the Gospel of our salvation.

How much more should we value these precious gifts?

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WHY DO THEY LONG TO LOOK INTO THESE THINGS? (350)

Now at this point,
We might ask why they long to look into these things?

And by doing this we can learn a little more about the angels.

Firstly that they long to look more deeply into anything teaches us that the angels,
Although of a higher order than us,
Are not all-knowing,

Angels are not eternal like God and they are not all-powerful and all-knowing like God,
Angels are creatures like us and there are therefore things which are hidden from them,

Remember Jesus says too they are coming with him in his final return in glory,
But they don't know the day or the hour.

Another consideration when it comes to the angels longing to look in to the mysteries of salvation,
Is that the holy angels never fell into sin,

The Scriptures speaks of those angels who did 'leave their proper dwelling' (Jude 6),

Those we know as the devil and his angels,
The demons,

But the holy angels 'always see the face of the Father' (Matthew 18:10),
Which is to say they exist in the perfection and joy of God's presence,

And so perhaps we can imagine that this whole drama of sin and the need for salvation,
Is somewhat intriguing and even perplexing for the angels.

One further detail, at least worth mentioning in this connection,
Is that angels do not have physical bodies like we do,

The word angel means messenger which is a description of what angels do,
But when it comes to what they actually are,
The Bible calls them 'spirits',

And so another speculative thought about the desire fo the angels to look into the Gospel,

Is the whole bodily nature of it,

That the Son of God takes on human flesh to save us,

And perhaps the angels are, again,
Fascinated by all this as it is foreign to them.

But one thing we know for sure is that the angels are servants of the Triune God,
They are his divine council if you like,

And so perhaps they simply take an interest in what God's interest is,
They occupy themselves with God's priorities,
Which is the plan to save humanity and redeem his whole creation.

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THE BROADER THE BIBLICAL STORY

This is certainly what we see when we trace the appearance of angels through the Biblical story.

That angels are used by God as servants especially in his unfolding plan of salvation

As humanity fell into sin and was cut off from the presence of God,
Driven out of the garden of Eden,

It was a Cherubim placed at the entrance to Eden with a flaming sword,
Guarding the way back in,
Lest man and woman in their sinful states eat from the tree of life and are forever lost in that path.

Can we imagine that there the angelic longing begins?
What is God going to do?

When Abraham came close sacrificing Isaac,
It was an angel who was sent to stop him at the last moment,

And can we imagine the angelic pondering continues:
A near sacrifice of a Son?
what does all this mean?

At Mt Sinai as the law is given,
Thousands of the angels are in attendance,

And as the ark of the covenant is made,
Golden Cherubim – again, angelic creatures,
Are placed each side,
Their wings above,
And their faces toward the mercy seat.

And now the angels are wondering perhaps,
Law, mercy,
How will all this play out?

And with the coming of Christ in the flesh,
That the angels explode onto the stage of this drama in the biggest way.

St Paul says in Colossians that the whole invisible world,
Notable the angels,
Were created for him and through him,

And in the Gospels we see this.

From Gabriel's announcement to Mary,
to the song of the angels at Jesus' birth,
through the warning of Joseph in a dream to escape,
to the temptation of Christ after which the angels serve him,
all the way to Gethsemane where in his agony Jesus is strengthened by an angel,

and of course at the empty tomb announcing his resurrection,
and again at his ascension,

from his incarnation to ascension the life of Jesus is surrounded by the adoration and service of
angels.

Christ is the center of the angelic world.

This is why they long to look more deeply into the depths of his saving work.

Although notice one striking absence of angels,

Where, unlike Isaac,

The Son of God had no angels to prevent his death,

Not that they weren't willing,

He said in the garden,
*'Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve
legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this
way?'* Matthew 26:53

So we can almost imagine the armies of angels just bursting with fervor to come down and rescue
their Lord from this injustice,

But Jesus refuses to call on them,

Because he's going to the cross to bring about salvation for you and for me,
For the whole world,

That salvation which is the very thing into which those angels long to look.

There are a number of famous works of art,
Where after Christ dies,

Mary is holding her son with deep sorrow on her face,

And at either end of Christ's body are two angels,
But the look on their face is different,

Not sorrow,
Not joy,

But more of intrigue,
Curiosity,

Longing to look into these things.

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CONCLUSION

Do we realize the value of what we have in God's grace shown to us?

Do we think we no longer need to contemplate the sufferings of Christ and the glories of his resurrection, ascension and return in glory?

Do we understand the blessedness of being those to whom God's plan of salvation has finally come?

Lest we neglect this, we are reminded that the angels of heaven who cannot be counted,
They long to look more deeply into these wonders,
and so should we.

Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus who has died and risen again to save you,

As you do,
there is more joy in heaven over every sinner who does.

And be encouraged,

Still do his bidding,
Serving us who are blessed to receive this salvation.

As the writer to the Hebrews says,
'Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?' Hebrews 1:14

And be encouraged,
The angels still maintain this desire to look into the mysteries of salvation even this very day,

Which is why we join with the angels and the archangels and the whole company of heaven in adoring the lamb who was slain,

And whose body and blood we now receive in the Supper,
For forgiveness, life and salvation.

Angels are awesome creature,

but the really amazing truth,
is that they are in awe of what God has done for you in Christ Jesus,

In the name of Jesus, Amen.