
St. Michael and “The Better Angels of Our Nature”

**An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith
The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels**

There's a book that I admit I have *not* read. But it has an interesting title. The title is, *Becoming Supernatural*, by Dr. Joe Dispenza [with respect and apologies for any unintended misrepresentation]. It's a debatable topic, 'becoming supernatural.' Nowadays there's an opposite notion. You may have heard something like this: 'We're not human beings having a spiritual experience; we're spiritual beings having a human experience.'

It's a pushback statement. It claims we are already spiritual or supernatural. That's how we're created, and life in this world is about completing our nature by becoming more fully human; more truly human. Now that's quite a reversal, isn't it!

Moving on from that title, “Becoming Supernatural,” consider a couple of related titles. These are books that I actually *have* read. I recommend them to you very highly. And they closely relate to today's Feast of St. Michael and All Angels.

The first book I discovered as a student. And wow! How long ago it was published—some 50 years ago in 1970. Written by the sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, it's title is, *A Rumor of Angels*. “A Rumor of Angels”—that's the first part of the title. And the subtitle is also compelling: *Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*.

The other book that I highly recommend was written by my late colleague and friend, Walter Wink. That title is *Engaging the Powers* (1992). The “powers” that Wink wrote about are not only political powers; the so-called ‘powers that be.’ Wink also writes about those spiritual forces that operate through political powers. However they also operate throughout human experience in groups and organizations, and in institutions and events in everyday life.

For example, consider an organization that has emerged in recent years called Braver Angels. They are a group that actually uses the word, “angels” in their name: Braver Angels. We have also sponsored their work through this Cathedral of St. Philip here in Atlanta. They specialize in workshops that bring political conservatives and political progressives together to engage in best practices. They offer best practices for reconciling with one another despite our political differences.

Now that group took its name from President Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural Address in 1861. That was the month before the start of our Civil War here in the U.S. back in the 1860s. In that speech the President urged us to pursue reconciliation before it was too late, by embracing what he called famously, “the better angels of our nature.”

The better angels of our nature! Now that expresses today's enlightened point of view: that ‘we're already spiritual beings having a human experience, not human beings trying to have a spiritual experience.’ Yes, we already have ‘better angels of our nature’ within us, and our challenge is to let those angelic powers also manifest themselves in our human experience. Go, Abraham Lincoln, go! That's our ‘Old Abe’—talking like a priest-president, by urging us to seek reconciliation before entering one of the darkest hours in our nation's history.

By contrast, consider our first reading appointed for today. There we read about the great Satan who is “the accuser of our comrades.” He is that dark lord, ‘who accuses them day and night before our God.’ (Revelation 12:10)

Precisely here, church family and friends of Christ, I commend to you one of my own best practices for being supernatural. It's a way to outmaneuver the 'powers and principalities' that war against our humanity. They war against us by 'accusing us before God day and night.' And our best practice is the practice of renouncing accusation, however you find ways to do that.

That's right: let us habitually give up accusation. For accusation is the single most damnable, diabolical, and toxic occurrence that undermines our true humanity.

Accusing us 'before God day and night' is what the Bible says Satan does. And when we engage in accusing one another, and even accusing ourselves within ourselves (for example, with negative self-talk), we are enthralled to that dark power and exercise loyalty to that 'prince of darkness.'

But we also have 'better angels' within us to withstand and dispel that power of darkness. Those are angelic powers that Holy Church commends for our spiritual warfare. It's a warfare where, day-in and day-out, the enemies of our souls delight to pit us against one another by enticing and luring us to accuse one another.

We can be certain that every impulse we have to respond to one another with a thought, word, or deed of accusation—accusing one another of this or accusing one another of that; every such impulsive act gets its power from dark angelic forces.

Instead let us pray that Jesus and all holy angels will come to our aid, to assist us in this perennial warfare, and to help us to achieve our humanity by manifesting along with us, 'the better angels of our nature.'