

**Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 4th October 2020**

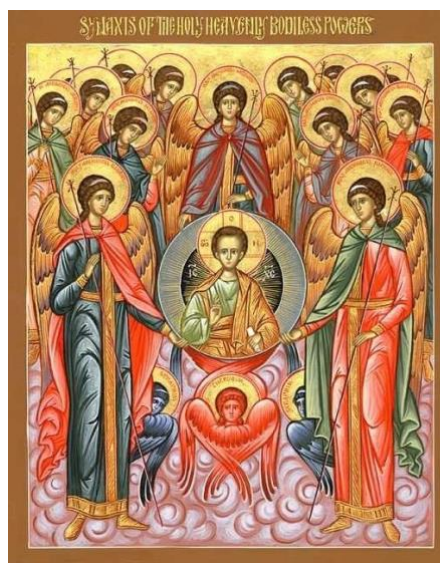


Dear Friends,

'Let your light shine before others, so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 5: 14-16)

The end of harvesting comes in late September, and on Tuesday of this week, the Christian church celebrated the feast of Michael, now coupled with that of the other Archangels, Gabriel and Raphael, referred to as Michaelmas. This Sunday we give thanks for the life of St Francis of Assisi. We give thanks for the fruits of the land and for the many ways in which God's loving care watches over us, both directly and indirectly, and we are reminded that the richness and variety of God's creation far exceeds our knowledge of it.

In the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Archangels are the great heralds of good news. Their service, as recorded by Dionysius the Aeropagite, 'consists in revealing prophecies, knowledge, and understanding of God's will which they receive from the higher orders of angels and announce to the lower order, ie. the angels, and through them, to men.' St Gregory the Dialogist observes how 'archangels strengthen people in the holy faith, enlightening their mind with the light of knowledge of the holy Gospel and revealing the mysteries of devout faith.'



'Icon of St Michael and All Angels' courtesy of Synaxis

His Eminence, the Most Reverend Panteleimon Lampadarios of Antinoes is a retired Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. He writes that St Michael was the angel whom God used to expel Satan from heaven:

When God created the angels, He give them complete freedom over their thinking. They had to show, however, that they were worthy of the honour with which they'd been invested. This is why their faith was tested. One of them, Lucifer, the first in all the ranks of the angels, the most splendid, most powerful and brilliant, succumbed to pride and thought he could supplant God and place his own throne above that of God. That was his sin: his great pride. He revolted against God and took with him a large number of angels who, with their fall, were transformed from holy to wicked.

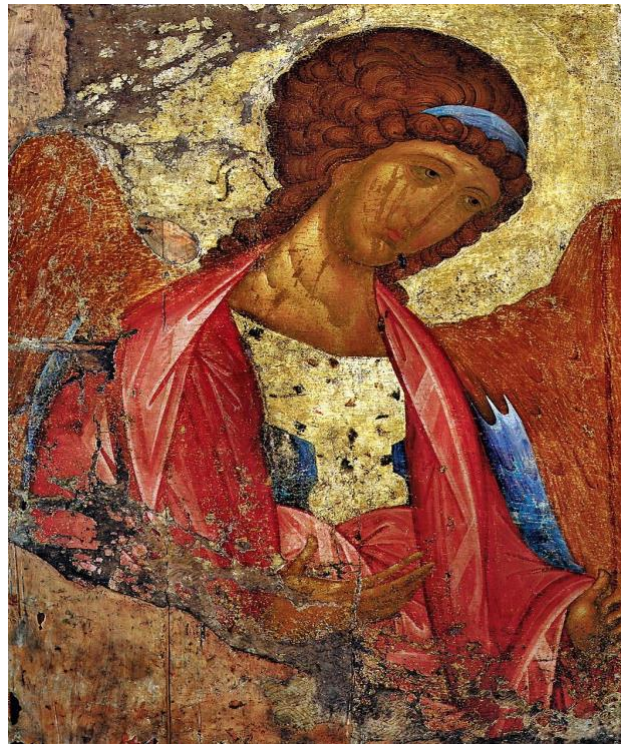
When the evil angels fell, all the ranks of the heavenly powers assembled and the Archangel Michael stood in the middle and cried aloud: 'Let us stand aright. Let us stand in fear of God'. Immediately all the holy angels proved their loyalty to God and refused to follow the wicked thinking of Lucifer. This is the event we celebrate today – not the fall of the evil angels, but the convocation of the holy ones who demonstrated their true and unshakable loyalty to the one True God and Creator of all things. The holy angels came together to express their loyalty to the Creator, and since then they've remained firm in holiness and goodness.



'St. Michael and the Fallen Angels' by Peter Paul Rubens

In our Gospel message today, Jesus sets out an unequivocal message, which even the self-serving religious leaders could not ignore! God is the Landowner; the vineyard is Israel; the tenant farmers are the religious leaders; the Landowner's servants are the prophets and priests who remained faithful to God; the son, of course is Jesus, and the other tenants represent the unchurched Gentiles, whom Jesus was teaching to see the full weight of the sinfulness of the religious leaders. Wow! Quite an exposé!

The message conveys in one succinct story from Jesus how God has sent His son to teach us how to respond to God's love and to live our own lives through His grace. The warning is clear to us all – if we choose to ignore God's greatest gift to our world in the being of Jesus, His son, we have turned our backs on God himself.



'Icon of St Michael' by Andrei Rublev

Using the example of the good angels, Metropolitan Lampadarios encourages us to follow their God-focussed example. He writes: 'When sin, however it presents itself, casts its enticing snares to trap us, then we have to be firm in the virtues. We have to cry aloud in faith: 'Let us stand aright, let us stand in fear of God', so that what happened to Lucifer doesn't happen to us as well. Our struggle isn't against flesh and blood but against the authorities and powers of darkness of this age. In this engagement, we have the holy angels on our side, continuously praying to the Lord for our salvation.'

It used to be said that harvest had to be completed by Michaelmas, almost like the marking of the end of the productive season and the beginning of the new cycle of farming. It was the time at which new servants were hired or land was exchanged and debts were paid. This is how Michaelmas came to be the time for electing magistrates and also the beginning of legal and university terms.

In the Church calendar, both Petertide and Michaelmas are traditionally the times in our year when new deacons and priests are ordained. In Winchester Diocese this weekend, the new cohort of deacons will be anointed on Sunday morning in Winchester Cathedral, and those who have completed their diaconate year will have been priested the night before, so that they can go out to their training parishes to celebrate their first Holy Eucharist with their faithful people on Sunday morning.



From left: Liz Stuart, Sam Scott, Sera Rumble, Matthew Renshaw, Craig Philbrick, Bishop Tim, Nathan Leigh, Jill Kells, Tom Etherton, Tim Dennis, Matt Bianchi. Photo: Chris Law

Amongst this holy cohort, photographed at their Deaconing last Petertide, Reverend Tom Etherton will be anointed as priest. Many of you will remember Tom, who came to experience rural ministry among us during his training for ordination. I have had the joy and privilege of walking alongside Tom as his Vocations Advisor and supporting him through his Curacy training.

At Tom's Deaconing, I was among the group of priests who were invited to contribute to his blessing in the Cathedral; laying our hands upon the candidates as they were anointed by Bishop Tim. An emotional experience for us all, as each of these men and women allowed the light of Christ to shine through them, equipping them all to devote their lives to the glory of God. As we all know, this past year has been a time of immense challenge for our world. The reaches of Coronavirus have extended even to this most precious of ceremonies. This year, the Michaelmas services of Deaconing and Priesting will be livestreamed from the Cathedral, but without the cohort of priestly support or the laying on of hands we long to honour our blessed candidates with.

We pray for all those called into ministry at this time, along with their families, that, like the Archangel Michael and St Francis before them, they may walk in the light and the love of Christ all the days of their lives. May they be assured of God's presence alongside them in their ministry, wherever the Holy Spirit may lead them. May their congregations value their good works, honour their leadership, support their missional work and through the slow light of the Eucharist, may they grow together in the unity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost.



'St Francis of Assisi' Icon in St Miriam Pro Cathedral

On my ordination to priesthood, my parents gave me a book called *'Benedictus – A Book of Blessings'* by Irish Poet and Catholic Priest, John O'Donohue. In it, is the beautiful poem, *'For Priesthood,'* which I share with you below. The understanding of the slow light of the Eucharist has stayed with me, deep in my soul and informs every action of my life among you. As we come to such an auspicious and blessed time of year, and as we prepare for our Ann APCM it is fitting that I ask you to forgive me my faults and failings as your parish priest, encourage you to continue deeper into relationship with our Lord and Saviour, and thank you for the rich blessings you have poured upon me and my family for which we are truly grateful. Together we go forward, letting our light shine before others, so they may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven.

Yours, in communion with Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice

For Priesthood by John O'Donohue

May the blessings released through your hands
Cause windows to open in darkened minds.

May the sufferings your calling brings
Be but winter before the spring.

May the companionship of your doubt
Restore what your beliefs leave out.
May the secret hungers of your heart
Harvest from emptiness its sacred fruit.

May your solitude be a voyage
Into the wilderness and wonder of God.
May your words have the prophetic edge
To enable the heart to hear itself.

May the silence where your calling dwells
Foster your freedom in all you do and feel.
May you find words full of divine warmth
To clothe the dying in the language of dawn.

May the slow light of the Eucharist
Be a sure shelter around your future.

Schedule of Services for October 2020

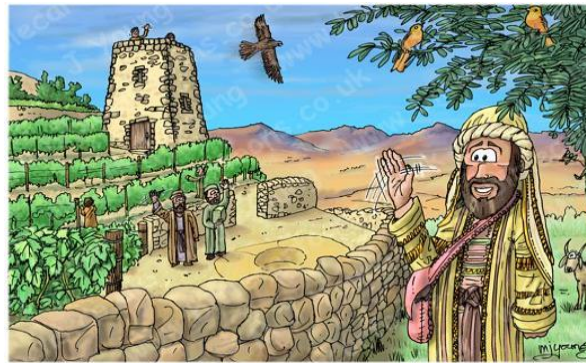
Our churches are open for regular prayer and for Sunday services - please see our website for more details at: <http://downsbenefice.org/>

All seats at our services need to be booked in advance. Please see the table below and book your seats by either calling or emailing the **Benefice Office** on **(01962) 880845** or office@downsbenefice.org.uk

	Chilbolton	Crawley	Littleton	Sparsholt	Wherwell
4 th Oct	10am - Harvest			10am - Holy Communion	
7 th Oct (W)			9.30am - Mid Week Holy Communion		
11 th Oct		8am - Holy Communion	10am - Harvest	10am - Matins	4pm - Evening Prayer
18 th Oct	4pm - Evening Prayer		10am - Communion		
25 th Oct	10am - Holy Communion	10am - 4th Sunday Worship			

Collect Prayer for the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself, and so bring us at last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.



Matthew 21:33-46 - Parable of the Evil Farmers

Now listen to another story. A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. At the time of the grape harvest, he sent his servants to collect his share of the crop. But the farmers grabbed his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. So the landowner sent a larger group of his servants to collect for him, but the results were the same. Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking, 'Surely they will respect my son.' But when the tenant farmers saw his son coming, they said to one another, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Come on, let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!' So they grabbed him, dragged him out of the vineyard, and murdered him. 'When the owner of the vineyard returns,' Jesus asked, 'what do you think he will do to those farmers?' The religious leaders replied, 'He will put the wicked men to a horrible death and lease the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop after each harvest.' Then Jesus asked them: 'Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see."

I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on.'

When the leading priests and Pharisees heard this parable, they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet.