

**Sermon Preached by The Reverend Jonathon W. Jensen, Rector  
Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
on the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels (observed)  
October 4, 2015**

The Pittsburgh Steelers filmed part of a commercial at Calvary last month. The thirty-second video made it on the web and television. It's also on the Calvary website. The premise was seeing fans in Steelers' gear in unexpected places. They filmed at a ballet class with little girls, at a rehearsal of the symphony orchestra, in an operating room, and at a church wedding. Each scene had a surprise *reveal* of a Steelers t-shirt. It was all official merchandise, of course.

Our part was filmed in the Lady Chapel. The Evans room upstairs was the holding and makeup room for thirty cast and crew members. The refectory was full of food.

Imagine our Lady Chapel with twenty extras all in their wedding finest. The bride wore a white dress, veil, gloves, and carried a bouquet of flowers. She wore a bright yellow Steelers t-shirt. The groom wore a tuxedo with a shirt over that that read "Got Rings?" as in Superbowl rings. Incidentally, we gave "And Also with Yinz" t-shirts to the Steelers representative. She loved it.

We had five hours of activity and about twenty-five takes of potential video. Half of the shots had to be redone because the groom's wardrobe was not properly revealing *one* letter. A shirt that read "Got 'ings?" would not push product like they needed.

Everything and everyone were treated with respect. We were paid for the use of the space, it brought people into Calvary, and was a lot of fun. I talked to many of the cast about Jesus when they realized I was not an actor trying to be a priest but an actual priest trying to be an actor. Alan Lewis, a *huge* Steelers fan, helped out by playing a wedding march on the organ fifteen times as the bride and her father walked down the aisle.

In the final scene, I served as the priest in a two second shot wearing a black cassock and a black and gold stole. My contribution was to take my own Terrible Towel and embellish the scene. That towel is my prize possession because it was a gift from Calvary when I arrived in Pittsburgh. As the bride and groom turned to face the Altar, I took the Terrible Towel, dried my tears of joy with it, and lifted the towel and my hands in the posture of prayer. It is called the orans or prayer position in church but *this* was a Steelers commercial. What was intended as prayer – was interpreted as a touchdown! I wish I had thought of that.

The primary purpose of the commercial is to sell stuff- official Steelers gear. The secondary purpose is to increase allegiance to the team so the Steelers are *our* team. They do that as well or better than anyone in professional sports. The Pirates and the Penguins seek to do a similar thing – sell products and increase loyalty and love so their teams become our teams, our people.

We can't play on the field but we can cheer, wear jerseys, wave our Terrible Towels, and recite statistics better than a Baptist can quote the Bible. We praise or complain about the kicker or the coach and how they affect us. We participate vicariously with the team through these actions. It becomes personal in a very real sense; we are connected to them and share in their fate. If you don't care a bit about football, we all still know how important they are to the city.

They have their own pantheon of saints, heroes from days past with iconic images to tell the story. Mean Joe Greene sharing a jersey with a kid. An immaculate reception. Ham and Lambert, Swann and Stallworth, Blount and Bradshaw, and modern day ones like Roethlisberger and Brown. They are *our* heroes of *our* team; we participate through them.

Today, we celebrate our own patronal feast at Calvary, the feast of St. Michael or sometimes called Michaelmas. A patronal feast is a celebration of a saint or hero of faith a church lifts up as its patron or protector or model. Having a patron saint emerged from the early practice of constructing a church over the tomb of a martyr. Ordinarily, the name of the congregation reveals its patron such as St. Mary's or St. Peter's church. Calvary is named for a place and event, the crucifixion and the hill on which it occurred, a symbol of good triumphing over evil. We observe that event on Good Friday, not a day for a celebration.

In the 1930s, the rector (Edwin van Etten 1917-1940) of Calvary decided to remedy the situation. He chose St. Michael to be the patron of Calvary. No one knows for sure why he selected that particular saint above all others. My best guess is the rector liked him, the feast day falls on September 29 which is *usually* a nice time of the year in Pittsburgh to celebrate, and at least half of the current images of St. Michael already existed at Calvary. Those images would have most likely have been chosen by the architect, Ralph Adams Cram. St. Michael, an archangel, is often depicted as a warrior slaying a dragon symbolic of good triumphing over evil. There are now twelve images of St. Michael at Calvary. See if you can find them, after the sermon of course.

Episcopalians are generally not comfortable talking about angels or at least taking them seriously. In the Bible, angels are viewed as messengers of God, delivering a message or carrying out some divinely appointed task. Most times they appear, the very first words are, "Do not be afraid." An encounter with the holy can incite fear or awe.

One of the worst things we can do is domesticate angels, or God for that matter. We make an encounter with the holy into a precious moment or tasteful Christmas card. A symbol of good triumphing over evil becomes a rosy faced, mischievous cherub – easily dismissed.

The feast of St. Michael is a reminder that angels and saints are real and present. They are our advocates, supporters, and fellow workers in God's mission. Angels are spiritual beings while humans are spiritual *and* physical or material beings. We each have a role to serve in God's vision for the redemption and reconciliation of the world.

We live out the faith and share it by working for justice and doing good through the transforming power of Jesus Christ in the world and in our lives. The spiritual works through the physical world, us. Good triumphs over evil when ordinary people stand up for it.

We are reminded in our prayers that we are not alone in this holy work. *With angels, and archangels, and all the company of Heaven.* We are symbolically surrounded and reminded of their presence with us in these images of stained glass and statues. The heroes and saints of the faith support us and participate vicariously through us.

St. Michael is our patron and prime example. His name asks a question. The name, Michael, means, "Who is like God?" We are called to be. That is the point. We can be like God when we work to bring about the redemption and reconciliation of the world.

The primary purpose of the television commercial is to sell stuff- official gear. The secondary purpose is to increase allegiance to the team so the Steelers are our team.

The Church flips the whole idea on its head. The primary purpose of the Church is *not* to sell anything. The Church's main reason to exist is to embody and share the transforming life of Jesus Christ – not to sell anything but to give ourselves to God and the world.

The secondary purpose of the Church is *not* to get more members. That happens when we are faithful to our primary purpose. It is to live from the awareness that we are already part of God's mission and are surrounded by angels, archangels, and all the company of Heaven who support us. The saints and their witness are *our* people.

As our patron's name Michael asks, Who is like God? We are, when ordinary people stand up for good and give ourselves to God and the world.

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