



# ST. MICHAEL

## *The Archangel*

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### ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

January 7, 2021

Dear Friends,

I am writing this just a day after the tensions in our country boiled over in a stunning way at our nation's capital. My purpose in writing is not to establish the facts of what unfolded or assign blame, but to address the cancerous growth of anger and hatred that I see in our society, which also affects our common life as a parish. It seems we have forgotten how to disagree without hating one another.

Disagreements are not foreign to our Catholic faith. Even saints have been known to quarrel with each other over the interpretation of scripture or matters of Church discipline. Such disagreements, however, can be had with love, which means desiring the good of the other person and striving together for the truth. The spirit of division and hatred, on the other hand, does not see the other person as a person at all, but only as an obstacle to my viewpoint, pursuit of power, or desire to do as I please. In this perspective, the ends (what I believe, want to do, or see done) justify the means (denigrating, destroying, or disobeying). This is the spirit of the evil one and is contrary to the teaching and example of Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, Jesus repeatedly addresses anger, hatred, and the treatment of enemies: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God..."; "... whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment..."; and "... I tell you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you..." (Matthew 5:9, 22, 44). Building on the teaching of Christ, St. Paul states simply, "If possible, on your part, live at peace with all" (Romans 12:18).

Many centuries later, St. Francis de Sales, who overcame his own fiery temper on the way to great holiness, wrote, "I state absolutely and make no exception, do not be angry at all if that is possible." Mindful of our tendency to consider our own anger to be justified (but not that of others!), he adds, "[Anger] is nourished by a thousand false pretexts; there never was an angry man who thought his anger unjust" (*Introduction to the Devout Life* III.8). These "pretexts" are what we use to justify ourselves while the anger gradually seeps deeper into our souls.

Now, there is little any one of us can do to directly correct the course of our world, nation, or even our local community. Nor is that our responsibility. But we are responsible for our own behavior. Each one of us is called to live the command of Christ, "... love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

This brings us back to my comment at the beginning that the anger we see on the national stage is affecting our parish as well. To give just one example, many would be shocked to hear the way our Hospitality Ministers are sometimes disrespected, insulted, or flatly ignored when they gently remind people to correctly wear their mask, or please be seated at a distance. That people of good will might disagree on the details of such policies is understandable, to express that disagreement in aggressive, unchristian, and disrespectful ways is not.

In the face of recent events, I call on all of us to examine ourselves and embrace the truth that disagreement does not justify hatred and that Christ's command to love our neighbors extends also and especially to those with whom we disagree. We may not be able to change the world outside, but we can change ourselves and how we behave here at home. As it turns out, that is the greatest difference of all.

May God bless you,

*Fr. Michael*