

And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Mat 21:23)

The questioning of authority (Mat 21:23-27).

* In our gathering today we are assigned for meditation and discussion of the small part of Scripture from Matthew. But in order to succeed the objective realities, we are to explain the previous context. It says that one day before the event we are going to talk about, Jesus triumphantly entered the City of Jerusalem. People honored Jesus as a King of Israel while he ascended Mount Zion on a donkey according to Zechariah's prophecy, (Zech 9:9). After that, Jesus appeared in the Temple where he cleansed with a whip the Court of the Gentiles from salesmen and animals. Nobody told him, *Man, what are you doing?*, while Jesus was driving out the animals and the merchants. Nobody said, *Are you crazy?* when Jesus overturned the tables and seats of the moneychangers. And none of the traders shouted at him, *How dare you do such things?*, when Jesus scattered their money across the floor. We believe that the striking actions produced the considerable effect on the people; even custodians had not arrested him for bringing such "a cosmic chaos." Therefore, some worshipers were filled with the fear of God, but the chief priests and the teachers of the Law got mad at Jesus, (v.15).

* On the next day, in the morning hour of prayer, Jesus went to the Temple with the news "galloping" ahead of him. *Could you believe?*, it was said, *On his way here the Teacher dried up that beautiful olive tree, by just saying a word. We've seen this. But how can it be?*, was a common question. Now, consider what does it mean, to dry up a green olive tree that traditionally stands for the nation of Israel? (Jer 11:16). Some people might have thought, *Doesn't it look like a gesture of the Prophet who by symbolic language predicted the upcoming judgment upon the rebellious house?*

* In the course of these remarks, it became quite clear that the Temple cleansing and the recent drying of the fig tree were the supernatural acts sanctioned and performed by God or a powerful angel. The opposition might have thought, *Since the Sanhedrin is the highest judicial structure authorized by God of Israel (Num 11:16, 17), Jesus' authority has to be questioned.* Soon this presupposition was turned into the powerful reasoning in the hands of the opposition. It is in this connection the chief priests and the teachers of the Law came up to Jesus saying *"By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"* (v.23). The intermediate goal of the Sanhedrin was about accusing Jesus of being an agent of the foreign god by means of contrasting the legislative authority of the Sanhedrin with Jesus' authority. But the final goal of the hostile party was about destroying Jesus' life, (Exo 22:18, 20).

* At this moment we start by developing a connection between the gospel lesson of the day and the ordinary time of the church. As was said before, the notable event of this week will be the celebrating of

St. Michael and All Angels day on Sep 29th. It is interesting to know that despite the global secularization, the popularity of angels is still high. Thus, according to *Time Magazine*, 55 % of Americans said that they have personally been helped or saved by a guardian angel. These angels are associated with God's messengers and servants who love truth and stand for justice. But to understand the significant role of St. Michael and his angels, it would be helpful to mention Satan and his angels. In fact, today we observe the popularization of demonic faculties, especially among the youth. The common belief in fallen angels in our society is growing as evidenced by the considerable number of horrible movies, cartoons, books, songs, toys, computer's games, and celebration of Halloween.

* While people draw their knowledge of angels from the cabbalistic literature, movies and etc., the Bible gives us the only reliable knowledge about the invisible world of angels. Therefore, our commemoration of *St. Michael and All Angels* is based exclusively on the information provided by the Scripture. As Christians within the Lutheran tradition, we commemorate Angels with the focus on our Lord Jesus Christ who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is glorified by both the faithful angels and God's people. Here we are to render a grateful thanksgiving to our Lord for these faithful spiritual beings who are guarding us against the devil and his agents day and night.

* Reflecting on John's Revelation chapter 12, we imagine the "battle of the gods" raging between the forces of heaven and the wicked empire of the old serpent. In the foreground of the battlefield we saw Michael who clutches with Satan in a deadly grasp. John says that in this battle Satan was defeated and there was no longer a place for him and his hosts, (Rev 12:8). *Stunned and effectually repulsed by the infallible merits of the blood of the Lamb, the celestial forces pursue him to an utter rout. After this, neither Satan nor his angels are any more to have the liberty of the heavenly spaces. Hence in the highest of all the Christian services from the beginning, "with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify God's glorious Name."* (*Apocalypse, The*; by Seiss, Joseph).

* The Scripture says that during the earthly ministry of our Lord, Satan attacked him by using all his arsenals: lies, accusations, false witnesses, and finally, the terrible execution. Starting with Herod, Jesus went through an unending number of trials and temptations for 3,5 years which were performed through the children of disobedience under the leadership of the devil. Alas! Jesus had not sinned even one time. That is why he was accepted by the Father as the spotless lamb sacrificed for the sins of the entire world. The previous and final victories over the darkness of this world, death, Satan and his angels, belong to our Lord Jesus Christ whom we address our unending thanks and worship.

* Now let's check back on our gospel lesson where it narrates the investigation regarding Jesus' authority with devious purposes. First, in order to prove Jesus as an agent of the foreign god; and second,

to sentence him to death as the anti Messiah. From the earlier context it comes that Jewish leaders had tried to impose on Jesus a title of a "Chief Magician" who had been authorized by the "Prince of Demons," (Mat 9:34; 12:24; Mar 3:22). Significantly, when the rulers came up to Jesus, the "Prince of Demons" stood right there as the leader of the opposition. We discern him by his old character as the seducer and accuser working in the children of disobedience, (Eph 2:2). It says that the opposition failed in its purposes because the Triumphant Entering in Jerusalem, the Temple Cleansing, and the Drying of the Olive Tree received confirmations from the Prophets. Next, the miracles performed by Jesus evidently identified him with the God of Israel. In addition, Jesus' righteousness and wisdom powerfully proved his origin from God. Actually, there was no need to ask Jesus, *"By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"*

* In our time the old serpent, satan appears with all his malignant forces fighting against those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus, (Rev 12:17). It says, the dragon became furious with the Church of Christ, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring. Satan blinds the eyes and minds so that people can believe and trust his children, the tares of his sowing; then the dragon leads man and women captive at his will. Considering the weakness of our sinful flesh and our inability to avoid sin is the devil's strong point; it is a heavy burden to bear the great thunder of the cannonading belches forth with all the desperate energy of hell trying to prove that the servants of the Lord are not fit for and they are not worthy to be! However, despite this, the saints overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony as it can be seen from the Scripture and our life experiences, (Rev 12:11).

The battle is not finished yet, but there is no way for satan to win a war against God's elect in whom the Eternal Love found a place to dwell. For *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*, (Joh 1:5). The gates of hell will not prevail against the Lord and his Church.

With this in mind all people of God say,

Amen.