

## St Michael

*In the name of the Father ...*

Of St Michael's interventions in human history, of enduring interest is that which pertains to the great Pontiff Leo XIII. The popular version of events has Pope Leo falling into an ecstasy and - reminiscent of the book of Job - overhearing a conversation between God and Satan who boasted that given one hundred years he could destroy the Church, time which God granted, prompting Pope Leo to compose the prayer to St Michael to defend the Church from her enemies. Although this account is contentious, a recent study concluded that if not accurate in all its details, God probably did afford to Pope Leo some revelation of a threat to the Church.

In his own day, Leo understood that threat as the new secular government of Italy persecuting the Catholic Church, seizing the papal states – included papal residences – and imposing their Godless secular values. Leo rightly saw this as inspired by the devil himself. Leo's initial prayer was rather longer than the one we now recite at Mass. A section of this prayer reads: *The venom of his iniquity, as a most impure river, the wicked dragon has poured out upon men perverted of mind and rotten of heart, the spirit of lying, impiety and blasphemy, the deadly breath of lust, of all vices and iniquities – the Church, the spouse of the immaculate Lamb, the sly enemies have filled with bitterness, have made drunk with wormwood, to all her alluring treasures they have stretched out their irreverent hands.* Then probably referring to the seizure of the Lateran palace, he continues: *Where the seat of the most blessed Peter and the seat of truth has been set for a light to the nations, there they have placed the throne of the abomination of their impiety, that the shepherd being struck, they may prevail to scatter the sheep.* The prayer then invokes St Michael to repel them.

Regardless of the precise details, Leo's prayer could have applied both to his immediate circumstances and to events still distant in the future. Certainly, his prayer is most appropriate for our own times since men, now no longer confined outside the Church but close to that... *seat of truth set for a light to the nations ... [men] perverted of mind and rotten of heart ... seek to pour out ... the deadly breath of lust, of all vices and iniquities upon the Church.* Leaving aside attempts to regularize adultery, and possible initiatives to regularize contraception, we can reflect on the recent Sex-Ed program released by the Vatican, charged by many respectable authorities as most inappropriate, even pornographic.

Leo's prayer addresses St Michael: *Holy Church venerates thee as [her] protector and custodian; she boasts that you are her defender against the wicked powers of both earth and the underworld.* Certainly, anyone having designs on destroying or debilitating the Church would seek that of one of her

greatest protectors be no longer invoked. The Instruction of the Holy See *Inter Oecumenici* on implementing the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council which came into force on March 7, 1965 decreed: "The Leonine Prayers are suppressed".

The Church today stands in extraordinary necessity... *sly enemies ... to all her alluring treasures have stretched out their irreverent hands*. Let us beseech God to send the Prince of the Heavenly host to assist the Church in her hour of great need.

*St Michael, pray for us.*

*In the name of the Father ...*