



## THE ARCHANGEL RAPHAEL

Raphael, from the Hebrew <rapha'>: to heal, and <'el:> God, means "God heals," or the "Divine healer."

The history of Tobias, father and son, contains the grandest angelophany of the whole Bible, and it all revolves around the manifestation of the Archangel Raphael under the assumed name and form of a beautiful young man named Azarias. At the very end of his long mission the Archangel revealed his own identity and his real name, together with the actual purpose of his mission: "And now the Lord hath sent me to heal thee, and to deliver Sara thy son's wife from the devil. For I am the angel Raphael, one of the seven, who stand before the Lord." In this angelophany, Saint Raphael reveals himself as a divine healer not only of physical infirmities, the blindness of old Tobias, but also of spiritual afflictions and diabolical vexations, as in the case of Sara, young Tobias' wife. Had not the Archangel resorted to an assumed human form and personality, it might not have been possible for him to consort in such a familiar way with men, for several consecutive weeks, because of the instinctive fear that man experiences in the presence of celestial beings. Had either

father or son, or both, known the real identity of the stranger, from the beginning, the Angelic mission could not have been accomplished in the charming human way in which it was actually carried out. However, the assumed form, and especially the assumed name and paternity-"Azarias the son of the great Ananias"-has been regarded by some as a sort of deception and a lie. However, the perfect sanctity of the Angels is opposed to even the appearance of sin and deception, even to what we call a white lie. In order to carry out his mission, it was necessary for the Angel to assume a form perceptible to man, a human form and a human name. In this case he assumed the appearance of an Israelite, a young relative of Tobias himself. By divine command the Archangel was to act as proxy for that young Israelite, Azarias, whose name he took; hence there was no lie on his part when he gave the name of the person he was representing in his human form. His true identity was revealed at the close of his mission, and whatever misconception had been created in the minds of the various persons he had met, was completely removed, and these were then grateful to the Archangel not only for his many benefits but also for his consideration in dealing with them like a human being. Besides, the Archangel was not hiding a human name and personality and giving another instead; in taking the place of Azarias he could in all truth call himself Azarias.

The story of the Archangel Raphael and the two Tobias' is too beautiful and too instructive for us to dismiss it with a simple reference: it reveals how Angels act when in human form; their Angelic nature, their power, wisdom, holiness are made manifest in the various incidents of this charming narrative. The Archangel is God's legate, he carries out God's plan acting as an instrument of Divine Providence, and Divine Goodness.

The old, charitable, and pious man Tobias is blind and feels that his days are numbered. He gives his young son Tobias some godly admonitions and tells him of some money he had lent to Gabelus of the city of Rages in Media, many years back, for which he had a regular note with Gabelus' signature. He wants his son to go and collect that money, but he first wants him to find a man to accompany him on the long journey: "Go now and seek thee out

some faithful man, to go with thee for his hire, that thou may receive it, while I yet live."

While this was going on in Tobias' home, Heaven was listening in and preparing the companion, the "faithful man" young Tobias was looking for. The Lord gave the Archangel Raphael the command to appear as a young man named Azarias, to accompany young Tobias to the land of the Medes, and to bring peace and happiness to two God-fearing but very unhappy families. As the young man stepped out of his house in search of a companion, one morning, the Archangel Raphael was there as if waiting for him, in the disguise of "a beautiful young man." "And not knowing that he was an Angel of God, he saluted him, and said: From whence art thou, good young man? But he answered: Of the children of Israel." In a very short time the Archangel informed young Tobias that he knew the road to Gabelus, and knew Gabelus himself, having spent some time there; he knew all that country very well. Tobias could hardly believe in such a happy coincidence. Immediately he took his new friend and companion and returned to his blind father. The Angel who well knew the purpose of his mission, implicitly announced it in his words of greeting directed to the blind old man, when he said: "Joy be to thee always!"

Not knowing who was he who wished him joy, old Tobias replied: "What manner of joy shall be to me, who sit in darkness, and see not the light of heaven." Here the Archangel Raphael became more explicit, making both a promise and a prophecy: "Be of good courage, healing from God [God heals, was Raphael's own name] is at hand." He could not say more without engendering suspicion and betraying his own identity. Old Tobias regarded those kind words as an expression of good will and paid no particular attention to them; he had heard such expressions so often in the past. His interest is now in the voyage of his son, and he wants to know in whose hands he is committing the life of his only child and part of his own fortune. Upon hearing that the young guide is no less than Azarias, the son of the great Ananias, he remarks: "Thou art of a great family." Old Tobias, like his kinsman Gabelus, later on in this story, expresses his belief in the protection and guidance of guardian Angels. Not knowing that

an Archangel is actually accompanying his son, he says: "May you have a good journey, and God be with you on your way, and his Angel accompany you." Had this circumstance been known to him, both he and his wife would have been spared all the worry and the sleepless nights during the long absence of their son. One thought, however, sustained the mind of old Tobias during his waiting: "Our son is safe: that man with whom we sent him is very trustworthy." How carefree, and how joyful must have been that journey for young Tobias. To travel in the happy company of an Angel! He knew the road so well. He was never in doubt about anybody or anything they met on the road; always cheerful, never tired or sleepy; so sweet and kind in his conversation, yet always full of respect and attention. He was deeply spiritual and profoundly devout in his prayers, pure in all his words and actions. How true and inspired were the words of old Tobias when, comforting his weeping wife, he said to her: "I believe that the good Angel of God doth accompany him, and doth order all things well that are about him, so that he shall return to us with joy."

The sacred text remarks that when young Tobias started on his journey with his Angel companion, his pet dog followed him all the way to the East. Tobias was one of the thousands of Israelites living in the Babylonian captivity. Some of them had settled down in neighboring provinces, such as Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Media. It was exactly in this last province of Media that Tobias' kinsman Raguel lived with his family. This was not really the goal of his trip to the East, but it was here that God and His Angel wanted him to go; whereas his father had sent him to collect his money from Gabelus in the city of Rages in the mountains of Ecbatana, in Media. The Angel by diverting his trip accomplished more fully his mission, bringing unexpected joy and happiness to three families.

Having left his home town, the great city of Ninive, that morning, Tobias and his guide reached the river Tigris just before dark. They decided to spend that night by the bank of the Tigris. Here the Archangel Raphael began to reveal medical knowledge and experience. At the same time he provided food for that evening and for the rest of the journey. Weary of walking all day, young

Tobias went to wash his feet in the cool water of the river before retiring. Here the sight of a monstrous fish that seemed to be coming up to devour him, frightened him exceedingly and made him cry for help: "Sir, he cometh upon me!" The Angelic guide, without coming to his rescue, instructed him on what to do, both giving him directions and inspiring him with confidence. At the end of the first day young Tobias had not yet acquired familiarity with his guide, so he calls him, Sir. Later he will call him brother. When the monstrous fish had been successfully drawn out of the river, it was cut open, roasted, and salted. "Take out the entrails of this fish," ordered the Angel, "and lay up his heart, and his gall, and his liver for thee, for these are necessary for useful medicines." These, no doubt, may have seemed strange medicines to young Tobias and he wanted to know when and how to use them. Here he begins to show more confidence and affection for the heavenly guide: "I beseech thee, brother Azarias, tell me what remedies are these things good for, which thou hast bid me keep of the fish." The Angel explains the medical virtue of those parts of the fish. More practical details are imparted as the proper time for their use approaches. The liver of the fish was needed as a material ingredient for an exorcism in order to free Tobias' future wife Sara from the evil influence of the devil; the gall was to be used for the cure of the blindness of old Tobias.

The Archangel Raphael had been sent by God to cure and comfort two afflicted souls, old Tobias and Raguel's young daughter Sara, the widow of seven husbands, all of whom had died on the first night following their wedding to her.

As night was falling, at the end of another day of their long journey, young Tobias turning to his guide asked him the customary question: "Where wilt thou that we lodge?" Here begins the first part of Raphael's mission. He must induce young Tobias to marry Sara, Raguel's daughter, and at the same time deliver her from all diabolical influence and vexation. This was a very delicate matter, for sinister rumors about this young woman, as being the cause of death to seven husbands, had reached Ninive and young Tobias himself knew all about her and was deathly afraid of associating with her. At the question of where to lodge for the night, Raphael had

proposed to put up at Raguel's and for Tobias to propose to Sara, his own cousin. "I hear," answered Tobias, "that she hath been given to seven husbands, and they all died; moreover I have heard, that a devil killed them." Imagine this young man, now, going to ask for the hand of such a dame! The Archangel Raphael obtained just that, and what is more, their marriage was a very happy one, blessed with good health and long life, so that they both saw their children's children to the fifth generation. The instructions on marital union given by the Archangel Raphael to young Tobias on this occasion remain an ideal of moral perfection for married couples for all time. Prayer, continence, and pure intention dispose the soul for God's blessings and thwart all influence of the evil spirit. Young Tobias listened intently to his heavenly guide and later carried out his instructions most faithfully, first repeating them to his bride: "We are the children of the saints, and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God."

Amid the charming and intimate family reunion in Raguel's home, described in chapter seven of the book of Tobias, an unseen struggle goes on in the spirit world. Young Azarias (the Archangel Raphael) absents himself for a very short while from the gathering of the family and friends in order to attend to a very important business of his own. During those few minutes, Raphael, in the name and with the power of God, "took the devil, and bound him in the desert of upper Egypt." This devil Asmodeus, who had caused so much sorrow to Sara and her family, was Satan himself. With the exile of the spirit of evil, joy, peace and all blessings came to Raguel's home. Having attended to his business, young Azarias returned and took his place at the wedding feast, while actually contemplating the face of the Father Who is in heaven. The following morning, leaving Tobias there with his happy bride, he continues on the journey, accompanied by four servants and two camels. He finally found Gabelus and collected the money for old Tobias and, on his return, he took Gabelus to the wedding feast of his kinsman young Tobias.

The last part of the mission entrusted to Raphael the Archangel was now to follow. Having brought joy and happiness to Sara and all her

family, it was time to bring a similar and even greater joy to old Tobias and his wife. The slow pace of the caravan that accompanied the bride to Ninive did not suit the Archangel who well knew the pain and the worries of Tobias' old parents: "Brother Tobias," said the Archangel, thou knowest how thou didst leave thy father. If it please thee, let us go before, and let the family follow softly after us, together with thy wife and with the beasts." Tobias agreed and taking with himself the gall of the fish, he and the Angel began to advance with much greater speed, the dog following them. It was time now to give the final instruction as to the use of the gall: "As soon as thou shalt come into the house, forthwith adore the Lord thy God, and giving thanks to Him, go to thy father and kiss him, and immediately anoint his eyes with this gall of the fish.... Thy father shall see the light of heaven, and shall rejoice in the sight of thee."

In the meantime Tobias' old mother was waiting for her son, sitting daily on top of a hill, scanning the horizon for a sign of her son and his guide. Finally one day Tobias' pet dog, running ahead brought the joyful news to the afflicted parents by his fawning and wagging his tail. All these human and earthly elements blend beautifully with the heavenly in this charming story of Angels and men.

Everything happened as promised by the Angel. Old Tobias regained his sight. At this point the heart of young Tobias was filled with gratitude, love, and admiration for his wonderful guide; so many and so great were the benefits received through him. Having witnessed the miraculous cure of his father he could find no words to express his feelings: "We are filled with all good things through him," he kept telling his father. Old Tobias understood that it was God Who was actually working all these marvels through young Azarias, and thus, full of reverence, he calls the young guide a holy man: "What can we give to this holy man, that is come with thee?"

The Lord never permits man to remain in error because of the disguise assumed by His ministering spirits in any of their apparitions. Sooner or later the truth about them will be made manifest. For several weeks in succession, the Archangel Raphael had been acting under assumed human form and human name. Now that his

mission has been happily completed, he begins to prepare his two friends, father and son, for a great surprise, the revelation of his real self. At the moment that they both humbly approach him offering one half of everything that had been brought home as payment for his service, young "Azarias" answers with a wonderful explanation of why God has so blessed them. He recalls to the mind of old Tobias all the good he did in his days, his charity, his mercy, his patience, his alms, and his tearful prayers. Thus he begins to reveal himself gradually in order not to frighten them with a sudden disclosure. The enumeration of all the good deeds and of secrets of conscience known only to God are the first step in this revelation; the second is the statement: "Now the Lord hath sent me to heal thee, and to deliver Sara thy son's wife from the devil." The third and final step was liable to trouble and frighten them, hence he begins with comforting and reassuring words: "Peace be to you; fear not." As he said this, both father and son fell upon the ground on their faces, for suddenly the human form of Azarias was transfigured into that of an Archangel of light and beauty, and the final revelation came: "I am the Angel Raphael, one of the seven, who stand before the Lord . . . when I was with you I was there by the will of God: bless ye him, and sing praises to him." This is the only reward that he will accept, but none of the material things, money and cattle and clothes offered him generously by his good friends. Yet, these could still entertain some doubts, because they had seen him eat and drink like any other human being, and Angels do not eat and drink as men do. To this secret doubt he answers with saying: "I seemed indeed to eat and to drink with you, but I use an invisible meat and drink, which cannot be seen by men." Now that his work has been done, and that they know that God has sent His Angel to fill them with blessings, it is time for him to return to Heaven: "It is time therefore that I return to him that sent me; but bless ye God, and publish all his wonderful works." Here the Archangel returned to his invisible form, and from the company of men returned to that of the Angels.

Raphael, the Divine healer, seems to have been at work at Jerusalem, in the days of Christ our Lord, in the pool called Bethesda by the Sheepgate. In the five porticoes surrounding that pool there

was a multitude of sick people, waiting for the action of the Angel upon the water of the pool, an action which cured immediately any person who first descended into the pool: "An Angel of the Lord used to come down at certain times into the pool and the water was moved. And he that went down first into the pool after the motion of the water, was cured of whatever infirmity he had."

The health-giving ministry of Saint Raphael may still be seen in the miraculous cures that have taken place up to our own times in many of the sacred Shrines throughout the Christian world.

...from EWTN

