

Catholic

UPDATE

© 2019 LIGUORI PUBLICATIONS, A REDEMPTORIST MINISTRY.

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999

800-325-9521
LIGUORI.ORG

PHOTOCOPYING
PROHIBITED.

C1912A

DECEMBER 2019

Angels Servants of God, Guardians of the Faithful

MICHAEL EISENBATH

For something mysterious, a great deal of buzz surrounds the subject of angels. Consider their frequent sightings in pop culture. They show up in movies, from Clarence in *It's a Wonderful Life* to Angels in the *Outfield*. They have been the subject of dozens of hit songs, such as country hits “Angels in Waiting” and “Wild Angels.” And angels have appeared on TV—the good, in shows like *Touched by an Angel* and *Highway to Heaven*, and the bad, in *Dominion*.



If you would like to find genuine devotion to the heavenly hosts, though, look no further than Scriptures and Church tradition. Indeed, it appears the angels were created before almost anything else.

*Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation...
while...all the angels shouted for joy?*

—Job 38:4, 7 (*New International Version*)

How embedded are angels in Church tradition? The Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels on October 2. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* dedicates more than twenty paragraphs to discussing teaching on such creatures. “The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls ‘angels’ is a truth of faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition” (CCC 328).

We have long been taught that everyone has a guardian angel. Such angels are our spiritual friends, assigned to us by God. “From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. ‘Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.’ Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God” (CCC 336, quoting St. Basil).



Schutzengel (Guardian Angel) by Bernhard Plockhorst depicts a guardian angel watching over two children (Wikipedia).

Just as we can ask the saints to pray for us, we also can ask our guardian angels for protection and guidance. They serve an active purpose for each person. For instance, they can send good thoughts into our minds and motivate us to do what is good. They take our prayers and good works to God, and they can show the will of God to people. There is biblical evidence that angels can protect us from danger. Consider that an angel set Peter free from prison (Acts 12:7). And in the Book of Daniel, angels helped protect Daniel in the lions’ den and kept three young men from being harmed in a fiery furnace.

We have long been taught that everyone has a guardian angel. Such angels are our spiritual friends, assigned to us by God.

More commonly, our guardian angels can save us when we might be headed toward sin. “When tempted, invoke your Angel,” St. John Bosco said. “He is more eager to help you than you are to be helped! Ignore the devil and do not be afraid of him: He trembles and flees at the sight of your Guardian Angel.”

While angels often are given human form in art and onscreen, real angels differ from people, as noted in the *Catechism* (329–30):

Saint Augustine says, “Angel’ is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is ‘spirit’; if you seek the name of their office, it is ‘angel’; from what they are, ‘spirit,’ from what they do, ‘angel.’” With their whole beings the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they “always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” they are the “mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word.” As purely spiritual creatures angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness.

Human beings cannot become angels. Although we often hear that a loved one who died has become our personal guardian angel who is watching over us from heaven, it’s simply not true.

Our hope during our earthly life is to become holy, a saint. That doesn’t mean a person has to be canonized by the Vatican to enter heaven; those heavenly residents are saints. Heaven is filled with countless anonymous saints, with a lowercase “s.” In the *Catechism’s* glossary, a saint is defined as “the holy one who leads a life in union with God through the grace of Christ and receives the reward of eternal life.”

Like human beings, angels are immortal (they can live forever) but not eternal (they had a beginning, created by God). Angels do not have natural physical bodies. They are pure spirit, with an intellect and will, and were created by

God to be his servants and messengers. As Jesus said in St. Matthew's Gospel, the "angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father" (Matthew 18:10).

Angels do enjoy something that human beings hope and pray to enjoy one day: the beatific vision. Yet in a bit of a mystery to us, their presence in heaven doesn't prevent them from tending to earthly matters. "When Mass is being celebrated," St. John Chrysostom said, "the sanctuary is filled with countless angels who adore the Divine Victim immolated on the altar." Although angels are purely spiritual beings, they frequently took on bodily form when making appearances in both the Old and New Testaments. Angels showed up frequently in the Book of Genesis and other Old Testament books to people such as Abraham, Joshua, Lot, and Hagar. One specific angel revealed how he had been working in Tobit's life: "I was sent to put you to the test. At the same time, however, God sent me to heal you and your daughter-in-law Sarah. I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand and serve before the Glory of the Lord" (Tobit 12:14-15).

The multitudes of heavenly hosts are eager to help us now, here on earth, and after.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce she would bear the Son of God (Luke 1:26). Angels appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:9-14) as well as to Zechariah (father of John the Baptist), Joseph, Mary Magdalene, and all the apostles in the New Testament.

Perhaps the greatest angelic devotion for Catholics is reserved for Michael, whose feast is celebrated with Gabriel and Raphael every September 29. Although often referred to as a saint, Michael is an archangel, as are Raphael and Gabriel. They are considered angels of high rank with unique responsibilities and leadership positions among the angels.

Michael is mentioned four times in Scripture: twice in the Book of Daniel, once in the Book of St. Jude, and once in Revelation. From those references, the Church has concluded that he has several key responsibilities, including to battle Satan, take the souls of the faithful departed to heaven when they have died, and be a champion of the Church.

Even though they don't have physical bodies, angels resemble human beings in that they were created with intelligence and free will. The Church teaches that soon after their creation, the angelic spirits divided into two groups: those that freely submitted to God's will and those who refused to do so. The evil spirits, led by the angel Lucifer, were driven out of heaven by the obedient angels, led by Michael.



The Archangel Michael wears a late Roman military cloak and cuirass in this seventeenth-century depiction by Guido Reni (Wikipedia).

Saint Faustina Kowalska is known to have admired St. Michael the Archangel's reverence and faith toward God. In *Divine Mercy in My Soul*, her diary, she commends his commitment to fulfill God's will despite the fact that his experience was void of an example to follow.

Yes, for us earthbound creatures, much about the angelic heavenly hosts is still a mystery to us. That often leads to confusion and imagination. But at least the creativity of the mind generally holds angels in a warm, affectionate light. The Church regards angels with love, power, and hope. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux speaks of how we should display affection for angels and consider that "one day they will be our coheirs, just as here below they are our guardians and trustees appointed and set over us by the Father."

.....
Michael Eisenbath was an award-winning sportswriter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Today he is a freelance writer and a columnist for the St. Louis Review, the weekly newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

Human beings cannot become angels. Our hope...is to become holy, a saint, "the holy one who leads a life in union with God through the grace of Christ and receives the reward of eternal life," says the Catechism's glossary.

Reflection on My Guardian Angel

I do not walk alone! How awesome!
Invisibly companioned along life's treacherous way
By you: a being of goodness and gentleness.
A deep mystery too wonderful for my myopic view!
My fragile being cannot withstand
Your august majesty, O celestial friend.

Mediator with God on my behalf,
Nudge me along gently;
Envelop me with kindness,
Gentleness, and sweet ways.
Let fear not overtake the goodness
I long to portray.

Friend of my soul,
Smile at my gawkiness,
And join in my moments of joy and elation.
Console and enfold me in your caring embrace,
Especially in those times when I need to know
I am not fighting my earthly battle alone.

Angel of light, inspiration,
Loving presence, constant guide,
I am humbled to realize
That I have you with me—always—
My steady companion, my guardian angel.

Graced by God with superior intelligence,
You stand in the presence of the Almighty.
I join you in praising God for your existence.

O angel most pure, how sad you must be,
When I swerve from the path of doing good
And give in to my baser drives.
Little do I realize that when I think
My insights are my own,
It is really you, O angel, who is inspiring me.

If ever I forget you, blessed companion,
Alert me to your presence with tenderness and love.
Be to me a guide, a companion, a true guardian,
The one who understands my fickle human ways.
Amen.

Source: *What You Should Know about Angels* (439065)
by Charlene Altemose, MSC, © Charlene Altemose (Liguori Publications)



THOUM/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Role of Angels in Prayer

Remember, we do not pray to the saints or angels. We pray through them to God. Saint Louis de Montfort famously stated that when we say “Mary,” Mary immediately says “Jesus.” The point of the angels and saints is not only to protect us and encourage us but also to keep us humble. While Jesus asks us to “come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28), it is an act of humility to approach Jesus with our guardian angel and, most especially, with Mary, the Queen of Angels.

—Kevin DiCamillo

SOURCE: *LIGUORIAN* (OCTOBER 2017) © LIGUORI PUBLICATIONS

KEEP THE FAITH

Subscribe to *Catholic Update* today at Subscriptions.Liguori.org to receive one or more copies of each issue.

Copies of more than 250 past issues of *Catholic Update* are available, with discounts provided for larger purchases.

See the complete list at Liguori.org/Catholic-Update.



Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

Scripture texts in this work are from *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC



Our Parish COMMUNITY

December 1, 2019

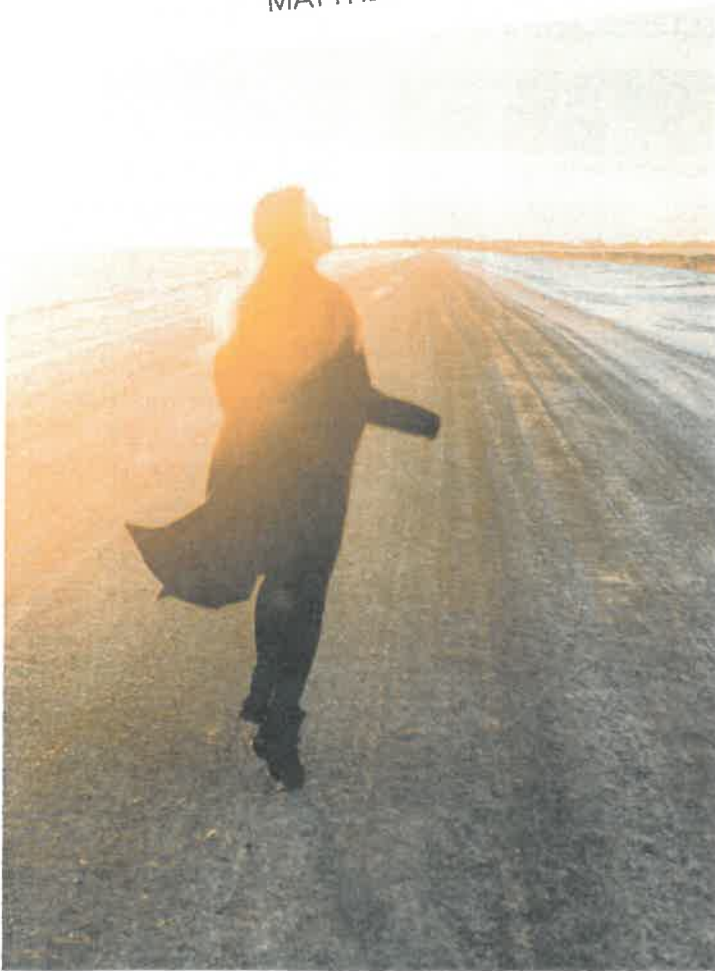
First Sunday of Advent (A)

Is 2:1-5

Rom 13:11-14

Mt 24:37-44

[Jesus said,]
"So too, you also must be prepared,
for at an hour you do not expect,
the Son of Man will come."
MATTHEW 24:44



KRISTINA PONOMAREVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

God Is Near

Be prepared! But for what? Since we're entering the season of Advent, we might think that we're called to prepare for the birth of Jesus. Advent is certainly the time to prepare for Christmas, but it's much more than that, for God comes into our lives in many different ways, even today. We see evidence of that when, working together, we rebuild not only cities, as Isaiah describes in the first reading, but relationships in families, parishes, and countries.

Remarkable changes take place in our lives when, as Paul bids us, we "throw off the works of darkness," works of rivalry and jealousy (Romans 13:12). God comes to us every day with the power we need to improve ourselves and our world. God often comes quietly in ways so ordinary we might miss them. That is the point of Jesus' insistence to "stay awake" and "be prepared" (Matthew 24:42, 44).

God certainly came long ago as a human being. That was a one-time-only event. We believe that God will come again at the end. That, too, will happen only once. But God comes more often than this. God comes every day to help us be our better selves. This is what the Advent readings tell us.

What can we do? How are we to prepare for God's coming? Today's readings tell us. We must work for the peace that Isaiah describes; we must throw off the works of darkness, as Paul instructs; and we must do as Jesus tells us: stay awake and be prepared.

—Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

FOR *Reflection*

- * Where do you see people's goodness that tells us God is near?
- * What can you do to make that goodness present to others?



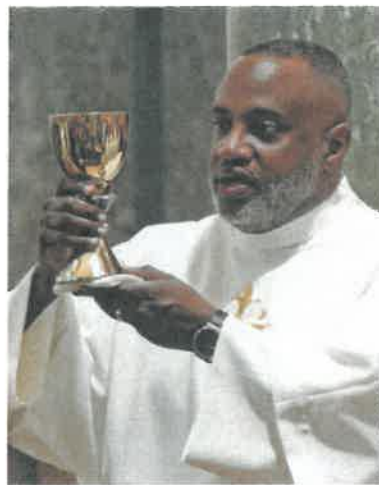
Editor's note: Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA, is pleased to join you at Mass over the next three liturgical years, beginning with today's reflection. A sister of St. Agnes, Sr. Dianne earned a master's degree and a doctorate from Saint Louis University, and honorary degrees and accolades from many organizations. She is professor of biblical studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

Dear Padre,

A eucharistic minister at a parish we were visiting refused my eight-year-old granddaughter Communion from the cup. Her father asked if this was parish policy, and the minister replied, “No, I refuse!” My grandchild receives both species in our home parish. Can a eucharistic minister refuse the Blood of Christ to anyone?

According to the United States Conference of Catholic bishops, “It is the choice of the communicant, not the minister, to receive from the chalice. Children are encouraged to receive Communion under both kinds, provided they are properly instructed and that they are old enough to receive from the chalice” (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds*, 46–47). Children who have reached the age of reason—normally about age seven—are usually advised on this matter of reception by their parents or guardians before they step up to the chalice at Mass. In addition, first-Communion instructions provide adequate preparation on the proper and reverent reception of holy Eucharist.

Essentially, children eligible to receive this sacrament are entitled to participate in the same manner as other members of the ecclesial community. “Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them” (*Code of Canon Law*, 843). While this canon specifically pertains to ordained ministers, it’s applicable for all ministers at the service of the faithful who have a right to receive holy Communion by reason of their baptism.



CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

—Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR
Sundaybulletin@Liguori.org



A WORD FROM *Pope Francis*

We can ask ourselves: Is this sacrament fulfilled in me? More concretely: Do I just like to be served at the Lord’s table or do I get up to serve like the Lord?...And as a Church let us ask ourselves: After receiving Communion many times, have we become people of communion?

—EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION, APRIL 20, 2018

Calendar

Monday

DECEMBER 2
Advent Weekday
Is 4:2–6
Mt 8:5–11

Tuesday

DECEMBER 3
St. Francis Xavier,
Priest
Is 11:1–10
Lk 10:21–24

Wednesday

DECEMBER 4
Advent Weekday
Is 25:6–10a
Mt 15:29–37

Thursday

DECEMBER 5
Advent Weekday
Is 26:1–6
Mt 7:21, 24–27

Friday

DECEMBER 6
Advent Weekday
Is 29:17–24
Mt 9:27–31

Saturday

DECEMBER 7
St. Ambrose,
Bishop and
Doctor of the Church
Is 30:19–21, 23–26
Mt 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6–8

Sunday

DECEMBER 8
Second Sunday
of Advent
Is 11:1–10
Rom 15:4–9
Mt 3:1–12