



Homily for 9/22/2019

26th Sun. in Ordinary Time, C

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Feast of the Holy Archangels

Though we are celebrating the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, in the liturgical calendar, September 29 is the Feast of the Holy Archangels, St. Michael, St. Gabriel and St. Raphael. In today's Gospel it is mentioned in the parable that Lazarus was "carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham." Therefore today, instead of focusing on the parable, I would like to preach on the angels.

There is a lot of confusion when it comes to angels, partly because they are shrouded in so much mystery and partly because it is hard to describe purely spiritual beings. There are also many who reject the supernatural and discount the role of angels in the life of faith. This is true even among some who profess to be Christian and even Catholic. It should be noted, though, that if someone rejects the reality or activity of the angels, they put themselves outside of the Church. As the Catechism states: "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)

In order to believe rightly about angels, we need to dispel many myths. First - no, when a bell rings, an angel does not get his wings! The movie, "It's a Beautiful Life", is a great heartwarming story. It has merit as a movie and in no way am I telling you to avoid it. However, at the same time I am telling you it contains bad theology about angels! For all the benefit of entertainment, Hollywood is not a reliable source for systematic theology. Second, when we human beings die, we do not become angels. We do not cease to be human beings with rational souls when we die, especially in light of the promise of the resurrection of the body. In fact, God has called us to something even more than the angels hope for: namely, union with the Divine Trinity as adopted sons in the Son. And it is precisely this that was the envy of Satan and the fallen angels. Third, the Devil or Satan and his demons are not equal to God. They themselves are creatures, created by God. They are the rebellious angels who fell from obedience to God out of envy of God's redemption of mankind through the incarnation of His only Begotten Son. Pride was their sin. But they further warp the minds of men by falsely claiming to be God's equal. The very name of the mighty prince of the Archangel, St. Michael, who wars against their rebellion, exposes this lie, as his name "Mich a el", "Quis ut Deus" means "Who is like unto God?" This rhetorical question-name implies the answer, "no one is like God."

Angels have as their main purpose to glorify God and secondarily to interact with creation. "St. 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". (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 329)

There are traditionally nine choirs of angels: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels and Angels. They are further subdivided into three ranks: The first rank includes the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; they were created to contemplate and adore God directedly. They are the closest to Him and attend to Him constantly. The second rank includes the Dominions, Virtues and Powers who were created to fulfill God's plan in the universe governing the natural order. The third rank includes the Principalities, Archangels and Angels who were created to interact with and serve humanity. They were created to watch over whole groups of peoples and nations, to carry God's message to men like St. Gabriel did to Our Lady, and to watch over us each individually like our guardian angels.



The Catechism says, “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.” (CCC 330)

The Angels also carry our prayer and praise to God and are active in the Liturgy. Here we are surrounded by the Cloud of Witnesses which includes the Angels. Incense is a sign of our prayers ascending to heaven like it is described in the Psalms and in the Book of Revelation where it says, “And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the hand of the angel.” We pray in the Preface things like “with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts ...” This last, being the very song of the Seraphim. (Common Preface I). We pray in the Canon of the Mass, “In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty.” And so the angels are present and active even in our midst today, helping us and assisting us in our prayer and praise of God.

When it comes to the life of faith, St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Ephesians that “our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, powers, rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits . . .” (Eph 6:12). But we are not alone in this spiritual battle, because we are joined with the Angels and Archangels who do God’s will. This is the wisdom of the prayer that we pray at the end of every Mass here: St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in Battle.

The last thing that I would mention is that the presence of the Angels is a sign of God’s love and care for us. They allow us to interact with God who dwells in inapproachable light. They also bring us God’s tender care and protection. Especially our Guardian Angel. It is a comfort to know that one of God’s very own creatures acts as a unique agent of His Divine Will on our behalf – sort of like a Divine Secret Service Agent standing guard over us day and night. Their specific task is to ward off the evil spirits who prowl about seeking the ruin of our souls. They strengthen us against temptation and embolden us in faith. They can, if it God’s will, intervene in miraculous ways. They are the conduit of our prayers to God and of God’s voice to us, and they are always present and ever vigilant, willing our good.

So on this Feast of the Holy Archangels, and in anticipation of the Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels on October 2nd, let us give thanks to God for all His creatures, visible and invisible, especially his Holy Archangels and Angels. Let us praise Him with the choirs of angels and rejoice in His providence through their ministry in our lives.