

# "MAKE FRIENDS WITH THE ANGELS"

**T**HIS WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29TH, is the feast of the archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. On Saturday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Church celebrates the feast of the Guardian Angels. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that their existence is a truth of faith, encompassed in that part of the Nicene Creed, that God is the "Creator of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen." Saint Augustine tells us they are creatures of pure spirit; named "angels" to describe their office or function (not what they are). "With their whole beings the angels are servants and *messengers of God*," their first task (*Catechism*, #329). Secondly, they protect humankind and care for its salvation. It has been ever the understanding - from Our Lord's words - that every human person, even unbelievers, has his or her own guardian angel from birth: "*See that you never despise any of these little ones*," Jesus says in chapter ten of Matthew's gospel, "*for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven.*" (NJB) St. Jerome, commenting on this passage, exclaims, "How great is the value of the soul that every single person has from birth received an angel for his protection."

Apart from Satan, who fell from God's presence, we have the names of only three angels from scripture: the Archangel Michael figures prominently in the Book of the Prophet Daniel, the Book of Revelation, and the Book of the Prophet Zechariah where he confronts Satan. His name means "Who-is-like-God?". The Archangel Gabriel ("the strength of God") of course delivered the message to the Blessed Virgin Mary that would save mankind and the entire world. The Archangel Raphael ("God's remedy") seems to have the most "column inches" written about him in the wonderful

story of God's divine providence and the protection of his angels found in the Book of Tobit (but you have to have a Catholic bible to find this one!). There are, according to one website, 227 references to the angels in scripture, from Genesis to the Revelation.

As they are that part of creation which we profess each Sunday to be "unseen", their appearance is often left to the kind of speculation we find typically in Renaissance art. This is likely the source for so many of those guardian angel pins which depict winged cherubs with nary a stitch of clothing. I prefer the idea suggested by the comic strip "Rose is Rose." There, the guardian angel of the small boy Paschal resembles the boy at various times, and a great and terrifying warrior at others. C. S. Lewis's *Silent Planet Trilogy* describes angels as nearly indescribable altogether – at least in human terms – attractive and terrifying at the same time; the story grasps for familiar ideas and words to capture their terrible beauty. For something altogether wild, see the prophet Ezekiel's account of his vision of God surrounded by the angels (chapter 1 and following). Just to imagine the sheer numbers of angels, given that every man, woman or child in history has had one, should give us cause to wonder. (Jesus tells Pilate that it would be nothing for his Father to send twelve legions of angels to his defense.)

"*Make friends with the angels*," writes St. Francis de Sales, "*who though invisible are always with you. Often invoke them, constantly praise them, and make good use of their help and assistance in all your temporal and spiritual affairs.*"