

ON THE HOLY ANGELS

On September 29 we celebrate the Feast of the Archangels. On October 2, we celebrate the Memorial of the Guardian Angels. With this in mind, we provide the following catechetical points on angels.

- The existence of angels is a truth of the faith witnessed to both in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. It is taught by the Magisterium (the Pope and the Bishops in union with the Pope).
- Angels are creatures made by God. They are pure spirits and personal beings. (Each angel is a person.) They are both powerful and intelligent. Note: Some people are inclined to think that the word “person” applies only to human beings. On the contrary, “person” applies to each of the three divine Persons of the Holy Trinity, to angels and to humans.
- It has traditionally been taught that there are nine choirs of angels. “Choirs” in this usage means “groupings” or “genera”. In order of precedence, from lowest to highest, they are named as follows: Angels, Archangels, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim. This is not to be understood as if there were some system of promotion from one choir to another. These are categories that attempt to categorize the essential natures of these created pure spirit beings. There is a dazzling variety among angels, not only from one choir to another, but among the individuals within each choir.
- Angels are not on the same level as God, not even close. God is God. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present, etc. Angels are not all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present, etc. In fact, some of the angels got into big trouble with God when they wanted to be on the same level as God. There is a lesson for us here. Humility is a bedrock virtue and there is no progressing in the spiritual life without humility.
- Angels do not and cannot give themselves existence. God made each of them and keeps each of them in existence.
- Angels are immortal spirits; their existence had a point of origin, but will have no point of termination. Human souls are also immortal spirits. However, angels are pure spirits, i.e. they have no bodies (material component), whereas humans are embodied spirits – body-soul composites.
- While immortal, neither angels nor humans are eternal, because every angel, just like every human, has a beginning. God alone is eternal; the three divine Persons are the only Persons Who have no beginning or end.
- The word angel means “messenger.” With their whole being they are servants and messengers of God.
- They always behold the face of the Father, which is to say that they always have the Beatific Vision.
- They surpass visible creatures in perfection.
- There are incidents recounted in Scripture and in approved private revelations, wherein angels have taken on human appearance. These appearances never imply incarnation. No angel ever has taken on a human nature; no angel has ever become human. Note: This is distinctly different from the case of Jesus Who, in human history, truly became human and will be human for all eternity, while remaining God.
- The angels belong to Jesus. They were made for Him and through Him.
- They have been present since creation and throughout salvation history.
- Archangels are a distinct “genus” of angelic spirits. They are the principal messengers of God. Three are named in Scripture – Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.
- There are hundreds of references to angels in Scripture. Here are just a few:
 - An angel was sent to keep Abraham from sacrificing Isaac (Gen.22:11-12).
 - The Archangel Raphael (whose name means “God heals”) assisted Tobiah on his journeys, leads Tobiah to his wife, Sarah, and heals Tobiah’s father, Tobit.
 - The Archangel Gabriel (whose name means “God’s hero”) announced the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus (Lk 1).
 - The Archangel Michael (whose name means, “Who is like God?”) is the chief angelic warrior for God (cf. Dan. 10, Jude 1:9, Rev. 12) He is also the principal angelic defender of the Church.
 - Angels ministered to Christ in the desert (Mt. 4:11), and in his agony in the Garden (Lk.22:43).
 - Angels witnessed to Christ’s resurrection (Jn.20:12-13).

- Angels surround the throne of God and give him constant praise and glory (Dan.6:9-10, (Book of Revelation)).
- The Church constantly benefits from the help of angels.
- At Mass we join the angels in invoking the thrice-holy God. *Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God of Hosts!* (This is the angelic hymn, first noted in Isaiah 6:3)
- Angels — the Archangel Michael in particular — are invoked in the Church’s funeral liturgy: – *May the angels lead you into paradise...*
- In the Cherubic Hymn of the Byzantine Liturgy the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are invoked, as well as our Guardian Angels.
- We should invoke the help of our Guardian Angels daily. *“From infancy to death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and protection. Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.” (CCC #336)*
- The main task of our Guardian Angels is to help us get to heaven. The ***Guardian Angel Prayer*** is an excellent prayer. It is as follows:
Angel of God, my Guardian dear, to Whom God’s love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.
- No angel ever was or ever will be a human being. No human being ever was or will become an angel. Note: It is common in sentimental piety to refer to children who have died as “angels”. It would be a service to the truth to point this out to the students because they have almost certainly been exposed to this particular inaccuracy.
- We should not try to name our Guardian Angels. God knows their names; we don’t and won’t, at least until heaven. Assigning a name to someone implies a claim of authority by the one doing the naming over the one being named. Parents name their children. People name their cats. Children don’t name their parents nor do cats name their people (as far as we know!) We don’t have authority over our Guardian Angels; rather God has given them a certain authority over us.
- It has often been said that St. Pio (Padre Pio) and other saints used to ask their Guardian Angels to go to other people to assist them in opening their hearts to God and minds to God’s grace.
- There are also, as mentioned earlier, fallen angels, led by the chief of the fallen angels, Lucifer. Lucifer means “light bearer.” He was created good, but chose against God. Literature has attributed to him the battle cry of the sin of pride, “Non serviam,” meaning, “I will not serve.” We often refer to Lucifer as Satan which means “Adversary”.
- Other angels followed Lucifer. We refer to these fallen angels as demons or devils. All the fallen angels were created good but, of their own free will, they chose against God, in an act of radical disobedience prompted by pride and envy. Because, unlike the intellects and wills of human beings, angelic intellects understand reality in one act of apprehension and because angelic wills choose permanently in one act of volition, there is no possibility that the fallen angels will ever repent. Neither is there any possibility that the good angels will ever sin.
- The good angels are members of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is to say that they are our fellow members of the Church.
- Because devils are immortal spirits, they too will always exist, but in hell.
- They seek to tempt us and get us to wind up in hell.
- We need to be aware of them, but should not be unduly frightened of them because God is infinitely more powerful than Satan and his minions. God is love and mercy itself.
- God desires that all of us be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and gives each of us sufficient grace to get to heaven.
- Our job is to stay united to God in sanctifying grace. Holy Mass, frequent Eucharistic reception, frequent Confession, devotion to Mary, the angels and saints, faithfulness to the Church and her teachings, acts of charity – these are our weapons and they are much more powerful than anything that Satan can throw at us. Remember, all those who die in sanctifying grace will definitely go to heaven. If a person commits mortal sin, or even many mortal sins, God, in His infinite mercy, destroys those sins — all of them — every time we make a good sacramental confession.

- It is good to keep in mind that our Blessed Mother, Mary, is Queen even of the Angels. This does not, of course, mean that she is an angel. She is not. However, she is their Queen and is created by God as first in the order of grace. This did not happen by her own power, but because God chose her to be so.
- The angels worship God. We are to worship God as well, in spirit and in truth. The Greek word that theologians use for the worship due alone to the one, true God is *Latria*. We venerate (honor) the saints and angels. The Greek word for the veneration due to angels and saints is *Dulia*. Human beings and angels and saints do venerate (honor) the Blessed Virgin Mary to a high degree. The honor due to the Blessed Virgin is even higher than that due to the angels and other saints. The word for the special honor due to Mary is what theologians call *Hyperdulia*.
- The Feast of the Archangels is September 29. The Memorial of the Guardian Angels is October 2.

To learn more about angels, I recommend the following reading:

- *The Holy Bible*
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *Angels and Demons: What Do We Really Know About Them?* by Peter Kreeft, published by Ignatius Press

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