

The Catholic Companion to the Angels

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***Make yourself familiar with the angels,
and behold them frequently in spirit;
for without being seen,
they are present with you.***

St. Francis de Sales

Introduction

A Catholic women's group once invited me to give a talk on angels. My first reaction was, Why angels when there are far weightier topics the Church should be concerned about today? The women's request reflected our culture's fascination with those mysterious creatures, a fascination that some would say borders on angelmania.

We are surrounded by angels in more ways than one. Their representations, ranging from muscular warriors to plump, rosy cherubs, are found just about everywhere. Statues of angels stand in mute adoration in churches, watch over our loved ones' graves in cemeteries, and entice us in gift shops. Angels appear in paintings and on Christmas cards, posters, lapel pins, t-shirts, and magnets. A baseball team is named after them, and a long-playing television show was about people who were "touched by an angel." There is even an Angels Collectors Club of America, whose newsletter is *Halo Everybody*. Its members collect and exchange items related to angels. The advent of the New Age movement, which embraces all strains of spirituality from traditional to fringe, further boosted the popularity of angels.

Soon after I was asked to speak about the angels, a curious thing happened. Two business friends invited me and my assistant, Sister Julie, out to dinner. One of them, Leo, proudly drove us to The Lobster Pot in his brand new white car. There we enjoyed a delicious meal and resisted the waiter's urgings to indulge in dessert.

On returning to the car in the parking lot, we were dismayed to discover that the lights had been left on and the battery was dead. The manager of the restaurant came to our rescue. He moved his truck next to Leo's car and attached jumper cables. Over and over Leo tried to start the car, to no avail. "Your car is too new," the manager explained regretfully. "My cables don't fit the battery terminals." Still he kept trying.

Suddenly an inspiration struck. Because I had angels on the brain, I prayed to Leo's guardian angel: "Leo is such a kind gentleman. This is embarrassing for him. Please help start his car."

Instantly the engine turned over! We thanked the manager, who replied, "Next time have dessert!" A few days later Sister Julie and I did return for our dessert. Ever since that incident, my appreciation of the angels has been growing. To my surprise, here I am writing a book on angels!

Do you believe in angels? Many people do, but some are skeptical, and still others flatly deny they exist. Faith in angels varies just like faith in God. One theologian stated that there is really no evidence in Scripture to prove the existence of angels. Nevertheless he prays to his guardian angel every day.

The Catholic Companion to Angels offers an overview of what we know about angels from the Bible, what the Catholic Church teaches, and what some people (like the saints) think about them. Even if you have not yet had a personal experience of an angel, you might enjoy dipping into angelology—that is, the study of angels—by reading this book. I'm sure this would please your guardian angel! (See chapter 12 on guardian angels.) After reading this book, you might pass it on, perhaps to someone named Angel, Angela, Angelina, Michael, Michele, Gabrielle, or Raphael.

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman observed, "Many a man can write and talk beautifully about them [angels], who is not at all better or nearer heaven for all his excellent words." I hope I'm not included in the "many a man." Instead, may writing my best about the angels bring me and all who read this book a step closer to them, to God, and to heaven.

Mary Kathleen Glavich, SND
October 2, 2013
Feast of the Guardian Angels

1 Who Angels Are, Really

I wonder if angels are amused by the way we depict them as lovely young girls playing instruments and as sweet, chubby babies with wings. Actually, angels are so majestic and awe-inspiring that if one visited us, we might keel over in a dead faint, just as the Roman guards did when they saw an angel at Jesus' tomb. When angels appear, there's good reason that their first words are often, "Do not fear!" On the other hand, St. Bridget of Sweden said, "If we saw an angel clearly, we should die of pleasure." Angels have extraordinary beauty, a reflection of God's beauty.

Angels are God's most splendid creatures. They are completely spiritual beings who have no bodies...or wings. In this way they are like God, who is pure spirit. But where God is an uncreated spirit who always existed, angels are created beings. We affirm this in the Apostles' Creed when we pray, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth." Heaven is the invisible realm, which includes the angels. In Scripture too we read, "In him [Christ] all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible,... all things have been created through him and for him" (Colossians 1:16). Notice that the angels belong to Christ. They are Christ's angels.

Scripture sometimes calls angels "sons of God." They are made in God's image and likeness. Like us, who are part spirit and part body, angels can think, choose and love. But they far surpass us in intelligence, power and holiness. An apt analogy would be that we are to angels as ants are to us! Scripture also refers to angels

for your spiritual
health...

Pray to the angels.

You might use *Angel*

Devotion Prayerbook,

a little book of prayers

collected by Luis

Valverde and published

by ACTA Publications.

as “holy ones.” It is high praise, then, to exclaim to a person, “You’re an angel!” Of course, that is an exaggeration, a falsehood. A human angel is comparable to a square circle. It’s an impossibility. Human beings are not angels here on earth nor will they be angels hereafter.

Contrary to common belief (and Charles Tazewell’s beloved Christmas story *The Littlest Angel*), after we die, we do not transmute into angels—not even the best of us. It’s easy to see how the misconception arose that babies who die become angels. Their innocence and freedom from sin make them pure *like* angels but *not actually* angels. In heaven we will still be human beings with souls and bodies. Our bodies, though, will be much improved—glorified, the kind the God-man Jesus had after he rose from the dead. They will shine like the sun, be free from pain and suffering, move instantly, and be like a spirit, able to pass through material objects.

We needn’t be jealous of angels. In some ways we are more blessed than they are because we have experienced salvation. Jesus became one of us and died for us. This is the good news, the Gospel that we pass on from generation to generation. It contains “things into which angels long to look!” (1 Peter 1:12). In addition, St. Bernard of Clairvaux observed, “If angels could be jealous of men, they would be so for one reason: Holy Communion.” In this sacrament, God becomes one with us human beings. And here is an amazing fact. Right now someone who is true man (and true God)—Jesus of Nazareth—reigns over all the angels in heaven and receives their praise.

St. Thomas Aquinas The Angelic Doctor



We have St. Thomas Aquinas to thank for largely shaping our understanding of angels. That is why his title as a Doctor of the Church is “the Angelic Doctor.” There are two more reasons. First, Thomas’s theological thinking, as revealed in his great work *Summa Theologica*, was so lofty that it was compared to the angels’ intelligence. Second, the story is told that when his brothers sent a prostitute to dissuade young Thomas from being a Dominican, he drove her away with a firebrand. That night, after praying for purity, he dreamed that two angels girded him with a mystical belt of chastity. And so Thomas remained pure all his life, like an angel!

quick quote...

We should get to know the angels now if we wish to spend eternity with them.

Pope Pius XII

fyi...

When Pope Francis met President Barack Obama in March 2014, he presented the President with a bronze medallion that depicted an angel embracing and drawing together the northern and southern hemispheres while combating a dragon that stood for all disruptive forces.

trivial tidbit...

The Angel Museum at 656 Pleasant St., Beloit, Wisconsin, houses thousands of angels, including the six hundred in the Black Angel Collection donated by Oprah Winfrey.

Science cannot prove that angels exist. Neither can it prove that they don't exist. Believing in angels is a matter of faith. As Catholics, we accept the Church's word that there are angels in the universe. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 decreed that God created spiritual beings that we call angels. Angels also make sense. St. Thomas Aquinas (1224–1275), the great Dominican theologian, reasoned that angels *had* to exist. He explained that angels are essential to the perfection and completion of the universe. God likes order, so there must be a hierarchy for created beings. This means that there must be pure spirits who rank between God (who is the pure uncreated spirit) and human beings (who are part spiritual and part corporeal). Angels close the gap between God and humans on the chain of being.

Thomas also pointed out that angels are the most excellent of all creatures because they bear the greatest resemblance to their Creator. Unlike God, however, they are not omniscient. Jesus confirmed this when speaking about his return at the end of the world: “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36).

The Number of Angels

How many angels are there? The prophet Daniel, who had a vision of God in heaven, reported that “a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him” (Daniel 7:10). The Book of Revelation tells of angels who “numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11). In other words, there

are countless angels. This is credible, considering that more than a million insect species have been identified on earth, and it's estimated that there are six to ten million more. Interestingly, in Muhammad's teachings, each raindrop has an angel. St. Cyril of Alexandria illustrated the multitude of angels by means of the parable of the Lost Sheep, explaining that the one sheep represented humanity while the ninety-nine were like the angels.

Where the Angels Live

The hosts of angels dwell in heaven where they are constantly in the presence of God. Scripture makes this clear when referring to angels "in heaven" or an angel "coming down from heaven." In addition to the Book of Revelation, which to a large extent is about the angels who dwell in heaven, Hebrews 12:22 places "innumerable angels in festal gathering" in the city of the living God, heaven. We call those who make their home in heaven *saints*. Therefore, we include the angels in the Litany of the Saints, and we add the title "Saint" to the archangels' names, for example, Saint Michael the Archangel. After we die and hopefully go to heaven, the angels will be our neighbors.

Modern Explanations of Angels

To some people, angels are not beings that really exist, but rather are only personifications of God's attributes or of his word. They conclude this from the fact that in the early books of the Bible the words *angel* and *Yahweh* are used interchangeably. Furthermore, they ask, why would God need intermediaries to act in our lives? The Holy Spirit is the one who was sent to be

trivial tidbit...

An old proverb reads: "How many angels are there? One who transforms your life is plenty."

cool websites...

To view the Litany of the Holy Angels go to www.ewtn.com/Devotionals/Litanies/holyangels.htm.

To pray this litany along with others go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbGHA0asdlc.

fyi...

This short poem
might describe our
experience with angels:

*Angels in our midst
Seen now
Through diaphanous
veil.*

Anonymous

our counselor and guide. On the other hand, some people think that angels are only projections of our higher souls, or they are our higher selves that became separated when we were embodied. Still others view angels as archetypes of goodness and evil or an invention that satisfies our need for superhuman support.

The Church does not accept these positions. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly states that the existence of spiritual beings is a truth of faith, a truth confirmed by both Scripture and Tradition. (328)

Doubters might consider this: If we are willing to search for extraterrestrial life through various space programs, then is it so farfetched to believe in angels?

