

**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.**

Today, were it not a Sunday, would be the feast of the three Archangels, St Michael, St Gabriel, and St Raphael (traditionally, they each had a separate feast, and because 29th September was the feast of St Michael, this time of year was known as Michaelmas), and on Wednesday this week we shall keep the feast of the Guardian Angels, so it seemed fitting to talk of the angels today.

First, what are angels? Angels are spiritual beings with a rational nature. That is, they do not have bodies, but they do have the use of the faculty of reason. Each Sunday in the Creed we say, 'I believe in one God... maker... of all things visible and invisible.' The invisible here refers to our souls but also to the whole realm of angels. Angels know far more than we do, but they do not know the conditional. That is, they do not – unlike God Himself – know what *would* happen – what might happen *if* – but they can see far more than we can about what is really going on around us.

Second, what do angels do? They stand between God and man in the hierarchy of created beings, and serve God according to their rank. The word 'angel' simply means 'messenger,' someone who is sent, but in fact not all angels have the job of carrying messages. Pope St Gregory the Great, drawing on the words of Scripture, listed the nine choirs of angels. There are:

Seraphim: the highest rank, these stand by God's throne in heaven.

Cherubim: guardians of God's glory, they symbolize His power.

Thrones: they carry out God's judgements.

Dominions: they command the lesser angels below them.

Virtues: these have power over nature and can control the seasons, the sun, the stars, the moon, and so forth.

Powers: these are warrior angels who fight against evil.

Archangels: carry God's most important messages.

Principalities: guard and govern places on earth, such as cities, and countries, and parishes, and, of course, Catholic homes once they have been blessed.

Angels: deliver our prayers to God, and His messages to us, and act as our guardians and guides.

All of this may be very interesting, but what difference does it make to us?

Believing in angels is not an optional extra for Catholics. We believe that they are part of the created order, brought into being by God Himself even before He created any part of the visible world. Funnily enough, believing in angels helps us to believe more deeply in God Himself because believing in *them* helps us to have a greater faith in the whole realm of the supernatural. Our devotions – our prayers – to the angels continually remind us that there is more to existence than the things we can see, or touch, or taste, or feel, and so on.

Believing in angels also deepens our trust in God because we have a slightly better understanding of how He operates, how He governs the universe that He created.

And knowing what each of the nine choirs of angels *does* means we can appreciate what's going on in the spiritual world that, for the most part of course, we cannot see, although that brings us on to another feature of angels, namely that they can, sometimes, if their particular job demands it, be made to appear, just as St Gabriel appeared to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St Raphael walked beside Tobias in the Book of Tobit in the Old Testament.

Knowing what the angels do also means that we can direct our prayers accordingly. Knowing that Catholic parishes have an angel appointed to watch over it means we can ask that angel to preserve the church itself from harm, as well as all the people who

come here. Once you have had your house blessed, you can include prayers to the angel appointed to look after your home, and everyone who lives there. Towns have angels, so pray to the angel of Ipswich for the people who live here. And graves that have been blessed have an angel appointed to watch over them, so you can pray to that angel for the soul of the person buried there. (Yet another reason not to be cremated!)

The Seraphim and the Cherubim are often mentioned in the Preface of the Mass at the start of the Eucharistic Prayer. Praying to them can help us to carry out the single most important duty that all human beings have, namely to praise and worship the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, every day of our lives.

But perhaps most important of all, on a day-to-day basis, is to make sure you pray to your Guardian Angel. All of us, from the moment we are conceived in our mother's wombs, have Guardian Angels. We learn about them in childhood and perhaps they often get left behind when we leave childhood, but they continue by our sides throughout our lives. Do not be afraid to re-learn the simple prayer to your Guardian Angel, and ask yours to be at your side day and night, to light and guard, to rule and guide you along your path to heaven. And when we die, it is our Guardian Angel who carries our souls to meet Almighty God. That will be a frightening day for all of us, so we do well to have made a friend of our Guardian Angel while we still have the chance.