

### The Holy Archangels Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael

The Legion recently added St Raphael to St Michael and St Gabriel in the invocations of our concluding prayers. The role of St Michael and St Gabriel as patrons of the Legion is set forth in the *Handbook*, along with the role of ‘all the Heavenly Powers, Mary’s Legion of Angels’ (pp. 139-143). We happily now complete our invocation of the Archangels with the addition of St Raphael. With the Feast of the three Archangels on 29<sup>th</sup> September, followed by the Memorial of the Guardian Angels on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, it’s good to reflect on the Angels, and on St Raphael in particular.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that ‘the existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls “angels” is a truth of faith.’ (n. 328) Thus the Nicene Creed refers to the Angels when it calls God ‘maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and *invisible*.’ And the Creed of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) infallibly proclaimed that God ‘from the beginning of time made at once out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and corporeal, that is, the angelic and the earthly, and then the human creature... The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing.’ (DS 800)

The *Catechism* adds further: ‘As purely *spiritual* creatures Angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendour of their glory bears witness.’ (n. 330)

Very often we pray to God directly, but it also pleases him to sometimes especially answer prayers made through the intercession of some specific saint or angel, so as to encourage our awareness of them and devotion to them. Likewise, although God is our ultimate protector, it pleases him to give his Angels the dignity of often being his *instruments* in providing this care. And although doubtless every Guardian Angel greatly helps the person under their care, we can well think that it pleases God to make the power of their ministrations conditional to some extent upon whether we do explicitly pray to them. So for all these reasons it makes very good sense to frequently ask the specific help of the Angels, in particular the Archangels and our Angel Guardian.

So the Holy See’s *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001) encouraged ‘an attitude of devotion deriving from the knowledge of living constantly in the presence of the Holy Angels of God’; and ‘serenity and confidence in facing difficult situations, since the Lord guides and protects the faithful in the way of justice through the ministry of His Holy Angels.’ (216)

The *Directory* did also caution about ‘possible deviations...when the daily events of life, which have nothing or little to do with our progressive maturing on the journey towards Christ are read schematically or simplistically, indeed childishly, so as to ascribe all setbacks to the Devil and all success to the Guardian Angels. The practice of assigning names to the Holy Angels should be discouraged, except in the cases of Gabriel, Raphael and Michael whose names are contained in Holy Scripture.’ (217)

One finds in ‘New Age’ materials a certain attention to angels. (cf. Pontifical Council for Culture, *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian reflection on the “New Age”*)

2.2.1) However, the *Catechism* reminds us that ‘Christ is the centre of the angelic world. They are *his* angels.’ (n. 331) So discernment is called for especially when focus on Christ seems lacking, recalling that ‘Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light.’ (2 *Cor* 11:14)

We think of St Michael in his captaincy of the Holy Angels in their combat against the Devil and his angels (*Rev* 12:7-9; cf. *Dan* 10:13, 21; *Jude* 9) What this combat really involves for spiritual beings is hidden from us, but we certainly pray to St Michael for protection against the forces of evil. We remember the prayer instituted by Pope Leo XIII that until 1965 was prayed at the end of Mass: “St Michael the Archangel, defend us in the day of battle...” St John Paul II had this to say: ‘Although today this prayer is no longer recited at the end of Mass, I ask everyone not to forget it, and to recite it to obtain help in the battle against the forces of darkness and against the spirit of this world.’ (*Regina Caeli*, 24/04/1994) St Michael is in a special way a patron of the entire People of God (*Handbook* p. 139; cf. *Dan* 12:1; Pope Francis *Address* 5/7/2013) so when this prayer is used by Catholics, greater protection is given not only to them as individuals, but also to the whole Church.

St Gabriel’s role in the Annunciation we know well (*Lk* 1:26-38; cf. *Lk* 1:11-20; *Dan* 8:15-17; 9:21), and every time we pray the Hail Mary it is his words we repeat. In his message to Mary, humanity receives its first communication beyond the hints of the Old Testament of the doctrines of the Trinity; the Incarnation; and the Immaculate Conception. (*Handbook* p. 140) And somewhat as Mary’s own ‘yes’ on behalf of humanity immediately opened the way to the Incarnation and to salvation, St Gabriel’s faithful communication of God’s message itself opened the way for this assent of Mary. He is the Angel chosen by God to draw forth the assent of the Second Eve, so reversing the evil angel’s seduction of the First Eve. (*Handbook* p. 141)

St Raphael appears in the Old Testament Book of Tobit. Sent by God in answer to the desperate prayers of Tobit and of Sarah, Raphael, disguised in human form, accompanies Tobit’s son Tobias on his journeys; encourages him to marry Sarah; delivers Sarah from a demon’s affliction; and finally heals Tobit’s blindness. At the end of the story, he reveals his identity: ‘I am Raphael, one of the seven holy Angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Lord.’ (*Tb* 12:15) The name ‘Raphael’ is from the Hebrew, *Rafa-El*, meaning ‘God heals’, and drawing from the biblical story, St Raphael is invoked for healing, for travellers and for the blind.

At the Sanctus in each Mass, we join with all the Angels in adoration: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts’. The word ‘hosts’ translates the Hebrew *Sabaoth*, meaning *armies*. So we rightly image the Angels as a Legion; and as we pray in the concluding prayers, they are *Mary’s* Legion of Angels. As primary sharer in the absolute dominion of her Son, Mary is their Queen – not only by honour but also as their commander. (*Handbook* p. 142) So with great confidence we unite our prayers to the Heavenly Powers with our prayers to our Heavenly Mother.