

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on the Feast of Saint Michael
and All Angels
September 29, 2019

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The Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels is a reminder in the church calendar. We affirm our belief in the linkage between life on earth and the life of Heaven. The secular world is no help in this regard. It vacillates between contempt for belief in angels as a childish fancy, and its own childish fascination with science fiction and pure fantasy. But Holy Church consistently and calmly teaches the truth. The truth is that although human beings are the only creatures in the material world possessing free will, there is *another order* of created beings, living in the *spirit* world, who possess this same gift. These beings are the angels.

With complete confidence greeting card makers and gift shops tell us angels look like fat little babies with wings, or like medieval knights in shining armor. In fairness to the *Hallmark* people, Renaissance painters share the blame. But Holy Church insists all we know about angels is by Divine Revelation. And our chief means of revelation about angels is none other than Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Blessed Lord frequently spoke of both good and bad angels. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke barely make sense without both the presence of the fallen angels and the powerful healings and exorcisms done by Our Lord. If we are mistaken about angels *then so was Jesus*. And if He was mistaken in this, what confidence can we put in the rest of His teaching? Catholicism is a faith tapestry, not a menu in a cafeteria! The Church's teaching about angels is not a "take it or leave it" option.

In a famous sermon, Pope St Gregory the Great reminded us the word "angel" denotes a *function* rather than a nature. These holy spirits have always been spirits. As such they do not look like fat little babies! In point of fact these spirits do not look like anything at all! But "angel" means *messenger*, and these spirits are angels when they deliver some word from the Lord.

In the Mass we actually join with angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven in a very interesting combination we can call the greatest mixed chorus ever! You and I are only able to look up Our Lord Jesus veiled in the lowly forms of bread and wine. But we sing alongside a heavenly choir which sees Him *face to face*! In the Mass we are joined in one choir, and in one worship.

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The angels stand in the burning light of God's countenance. But that light is an inspiration and not a distraction. From the Divine light it is *earthly things* which are the object of angelic care and attention. Raphael was very much mixed up in the affairs of Tobias. We all know of the dealings of Gabriel with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Saint Joseph seemed to be guided by an angelic family chaplain working full time. Michael deals with weighty matters requiring the supreme power of Almighty God. Yet Michael is also invoked as the one who can rescue an individual soul from Hell. (This fact is attested in the ancient offertory of the Requiem Mass.) So the angels are involved in human matters. And while their appearance is awesome precisely because they are holy, their message is always one of *refreshment*. Angelic timing is *perfect*. Their message comes when needed, and makes us feel at home in the providence and presence of God. Gabriel says "*Fear not, Mary.*" And she does not fear.

You and I are in the business of being disciples of Christ. We are to appropriate the Light of the Word-made-Flesh. Just as the angels behold God face to face, yet deal with things on earth, so too for us. It is both in our relations with the supernatural world and our physical relations with matter where we engage in the practical activities of Catholic life. In that work the angels are *pilots*, commissioned by God to steer us and guard us.

In our earthly worship the presence of the holy angels with our congregation gives us an experience of the environment of Heaven. These angels seem strange to us in other contexts than worship. Why? Because with them we belong in Heaven and ultimately not here. And with the angels of God, Heaven is the only place we shall ever really be at home.