

A STUDY ON ARCHANGELS, ANGELS AND GUARDIAN ANGELS AND THE
HIERARCHY OF ANGELS

Fourth Lesson from the book of Revelation

Who are Angels? Angels are spiritual creatures who glorify God without ceasing and who serve his saving plans for other creatures. The angels surround Christ their Lord. They serve him especially in the accomplishment of his saving mission to men. The Church venerates the angels who help her on her earthly pilgrimage and protect every human being. God willed the diversity of his creatures and their own particular goodness, their interdependence and their order.

Christ "with all his angels": Christ is the center of the angelic world. They are his angels: "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him (Mt 25:31) They belong to him because they were created through and for him: "for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him."(Col 1:16). They belong to him still more because he has made them messengers of his saving plan: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" (Heb 1:14).

Angels have been present since creation and throughout the history of salvation, announcing this salvation from afar or near and serving the accomplishment of the divine plan: they closed the earthly paradise; protected Lot; saved Hagar and her child; stayed Abraham's hand; communicated the law by their ministry; led the People of God; announced births and callings; and assisted the prophets, just to cite a few examples. Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Precursor and that of Jesus himself.

From the Incarnation to the Ascension: The life of the Word Incarnate (Jesus) is surrounded by the adoration and service of angels. When God "brings the firstborn into the world, he says: 'Let all God's angels worship him (Heb 1:6).'" Their song of praise at the birth of Christ has not ceased resounding in the Church's praise: "Glory to God in the highest!" They protected Jesus in his infancy, served him in the desert, and strengthened him in his agony in the garden. Again, it is the angels who "evangelize" by proclaiming the Good News of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection. They will be present at Christ's return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgement.

The angels in the life of the Church: The whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of angels. In her liturgy, the Church joins with the angels to adore the thrice-holy God. She invokes their assistance (in the funeral liturgy's In Paradisum deducant te angeli) "May the angels lead you into Paradise. . ." From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession.

"Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life." Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God

Archangel Michael is the only named archangel in Scripture in two places (1 Thess 4:16/ Jude 1:9) St. Michael is the chief among them. One of the duties of an archangel, as seen in Daniel 10, is to engage in spiritual warfare.

Gabriel is the most well-known named angel to appear in Scripture. He is seen acting as a messenger to impart wisdom or a special announcement from God. In the book of Daniel, Gabriel appeared to the prophet Daniel in order to explain some visions God gave Daniel about the end times (Daniel 8:15–27; 9:20–27). While Daniel still had trouble understanding the visions, Gabriel’s explanations, along with other biblical information about the end times, have allowed us to come to some conclusions about how the end times will play out. Gabriel also appears in the New Testament. He appears to Zacharias in the temple to herald the news that Zacharias’s wife, Elizabeth, would give birth to John. Gabriel also approaches Mary with the announcement of the birth of Christ. Later, Joseph receives guidance in a couple visits from Gabriel. Because of the monumental importance of these history-shaping announcements, it seems likely that Gabriel is one of God’s chief messengers.

Raphael as a healer: The angel Raphael does appear in the book of Tobit. In the book of Tobias, Raphael identifies himself as one of seven archangels “who stand before the Lord” (Tobit 12:15). Raphael also offers prayers on Tobias’ behalf, and Tobias, in turn, thanks the angel because he is “filled with all good things through him” (Tobit 12:3). The evangelist John sheds some light on the religious notions in the time of Christ. “A great multitude of sick people” are sitting beside a pool in Jerusalem, waiting for “the moving of the water.” They believed that an angel would descend from heaven and stir the water, making the pool a place of healing for them. Jesus approaches a man who had been infirm for 38 years and asks him if he wants to be healed. The man’s sad, superstitious reply is that he cannot be healed, because he cannot get into the pool quickly enough. Jesus then bypasses all superstition and shows His power to immediately heal the man (John 5:3-9).

Guardian angels: Matthew 18:10 states “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” The Jews fully developed the belief in guardian angels during the time between the Old and New Testament periods. Some early church fathers believed that each person had a good angel assigned to him/her. The belief in guardian angels has been around for a long time, but there is no explicit scriptural basis for it. To return to Matthew 18:10, the word “their” is a collective pronoun in the Greek and refers to the fact that believers are served by angels in general. These angels are pictured as “always” watching the face of God so as to hear His command to them to help a believer when it

is needed. God does use angels in ministering to us. It is scriptural to say that He uses them as He uses us; that is, He in no way needs us or them to accomplish His purposes, but chooses to use us and them nevertheless (Hebrews 1:7). We all have angels watching over us but a Guardian Angel plays a slightly more personal role: they are with us from birth until death and likely beyond.

The Angelic Hierarchy: We know from the Holy Scriptures and from the Christian tradition that there are different names given to groups of angels. Over the centuries, many theologians and spiritual writers have considered the choirs from various perspectives. Understanding of the angels in the bible and in the church helps us to grow in our spiritual journey because they are our spiritual companions. These designations are not matters of dogma but rather spiritual tools to help us to appreciate the ways of holiness, They are the means by which God assists us through the mediation of the angels. In the fourth and fifth centuries, we begin to see an increasing interest in the role of the angels among the Fathers of the Church and other Christian writers. One of these was an anonymous fifth-century monk who wrote under the name of St. Paul's famous convert, Dionysius the Areopagite. He is commonly known as "Pseudo-Dionysius" and is the person to whom we owe our common Christian understanding of the relationship between the ranks and choirs of the angels.

Outline of the Order of Angels:

The highest group of angels — the seraphim, the cherubim, and the thrones.

The second level of the angels are the dominations, the virtues, and the powers..

The third group are the principalities, the archangels, and the angels.

The first Group:

Seraphim: They are the angels closest to God. They are on fire with the love of God. The very name means "incandescent ones" or "burning ones." Classical sacred art portrays them as entirely red and ablaze. They are usually depicted as having six wings but no faces. Because of this burning love, more than any other angel they have the most perfect knowledge of God, which makes them the most perfect adorers. According to the prophet Isaiah, the seraphim are the angels whom he hears crying out "Holy, holy, holy," as one of them purifies Isaiah's mouth with a coal from the altar so that he might serve as the Lord's messenger (Isa. 6:3–8). In the holy Mass, the priest evokes this moment as he prays for worthiness in proclaiming the Gospel by praying "cleanse my heart and my lips almighty God that I may proclaim worthily your holy gospel". We too should pray to the seraphim that we might be purified in our responsibilities as teachers and bearers of the Word to our families, our friends, and all those over whom we have responsibility.

Cherubim: The cherubim have a deep intellectual knowledge of divine secrets and of the ultimate causes of things; their name means "all-knowing one." As such, they constantly contemplate the wisdom and the love of God in His relationship with mankind. They reflect His omniscience. The images of the cherubim were the only images of beings that were permitted in the ancient Temple of Jerusalem. Their carved figures adorned the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, which prefigured both the Virgin Mary "tabernacling" the unborn Christ and the Eucharistic tabernacles of our churches, containing the new manna of Christ's sacramental Body and Blood. The cherubim are still considered protectors of the New Covenant and so are often depicted on tabernacles and Eucharistic vessels.

Thrones: A throne manifests the glory and authority of a king; it expresses stability and power. And since a throne is also a judgment seat, these angels are especially concerned with divine judgments and ordinances. In the early Church, a common representation of God's glory in Heaven was a mosaic behind the altar and above the seat of the bishop that represented an empty throne with a radiant cross mounted above it. This image represented Christ the King, Lord of all and Judge of the living and the dead.

The Second Group

Dominion: The dominion are concerned with the government of the universe. The dominions in particular are involved in the workings of divine power. They coordinate the ministries of all the angels who deal with creation. We see in the angelic world that the Church's teaching that God works through secondary causes is beautifully demonstrated.

Virtues: Virtues are known as the Spirits of Motion and control the elements. They are sometimes referred to as "the shining ones." They govern all nature. They have control over seasons, stars, moon; even the sun is subject to their command. They are also in charge of miracles and provide courage, grace, and valor.

Powers: Powers are Warrior Angels against evil defending the cosmos and humans. They are known as potentates. They fight against evil spirits who attempt to wreak chaos through human beings. The chief is said to be either Samael or Camael, both angels of darkness.

The Third Group:

Principalities: Principalities are the leading choir of the last hierarchy of angels. Their activities are described by Pseudo-Dionysius in this way, "The name of the Celestial Principalities signifies their Godlike princeliness and authoritativeness in an Order which is holy and most fitting to the princely Powers." They are often seen as being the guardians of nations or peoples; this is why St. Michael is described in the book of Daniel as "the prince of Israel," who comes to the aid of Gabriel against the demonic prince of Persia. It seems fitting that this first choir in the "ring of salvation" should also look after the spiritual structure of the supernatural life of the Church

Archangels: Archangels are generally taken to mean "chief or leading angel" (Jude 9; 1 Thes 4:16), they are the most frequently mentioned throughout the Bible. The Archangels have a unique role as God's messenger to the people at critical times in history and salvation (Tb 12:6, 15; Jn 5:4; Rv 12:7-9) as in The Annunciation and Apocalypse. A feast day celebrating the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael is celebrated throughout the Church Sep 29. Of special significance is St. Michael as he has been invoked as patron and protector by the Church from the time of the Apostles. The angel Gabriel first appeared in the Old Testament in the prophecies of Daniel, he announced the prophecy of 70 weeks (Dn 9:21-27). He appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of St. John the Baptist (Lk 1:11). It was also Gabriel which proclaimed the Annunciation of Mary to be the mother of our Lord and Savior. (Lk 1:26) The angel Raphael first appeared in the book of Tobit (Tobias)Tb 3:25, 5:5-28, 6-12). He announces "I am the Angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the throne of God." (Tb 12:15)

Angels: The ninth and final choir of angels is composed of those who are most involved with the doings of mankind. These angels are those who are sent out on missions from God and from whom the guardian angels are chosen. The angels who fill up this choir may be the lowest, but they are beloved because the Lord places them at our sides to watch over us and to care for us. They are the ministers of Christ's love and our protectors. They defend us against harm and temptation. They warn us of impending evil and inspire us to remain faithful to God in prayer.