Like Angels, We are Messengers

Last week on Wednesday, October 2nd, we celebrated the feast of the Guardian Angels. A few days prior on Sunday, September 29th, we had the feast of Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and the Archangels; however as it fell on a Sunday last week, it was not a solemnity so as such did not replace the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Despite that, angels are worth thinking about. While we might think of them from angels in movies or TV shows, I think at times there can be a misconception of what angels are and what they do.

One good way to sum up the function of an angel is by seeing them as messengers of God.

Michael appears in a vision from Daniel as a “great prince” who defends Israel against it’s enemies, and in Revelation, it’s Michael who leads God’s armies to final victory over the forces of evil. Many of us are familiar with the prayer asking for the protection of Saint Michael the Archangel, asking for his protection as we go into battle; appropriately it was said at the end of Mass as a kind of way to prepare to leave and go into the battle of daily life.

Gabriel is a messenger who we meet in the Gospel announcing to Mary that she is invited to bring Jesus into the world.

Raphael we meet in the Old Testament story of Tobit; he guides Tobit’s son Tobiah through a series of adventures.

Reflecting on these heavenly beings, I think a good thing to think about is how we experience God’s protection, communication and guidance in our lives. God does not leave us orphans; God is also guiding and giving us messages if only we’d listen to Him.

Angels are also unique to us too; we call these our “guardian angels.”

Though there’s a lot of theology behind angels, the web site “saintoftheday.org," (run by the Franciscans, very helpful to learn about the feast days of the various saints) summarizes guardian angels in the following way:

Perhaps no aspect of Catholic piety is as comforting to parents as the belief that an angel protects their little ones from dangers real and imagined. Yet guardian angels are not only for children. Their role is to represent individuals before God, to watch over them always, to aid their prayer, and to present their souls to God at death.

The concept of an angel assigned to guide and nurture each human being is a development of Catholic doctrine and piety based on Scripture but not directly drawn from it. Jesus words in Matthew 18:10 best support the belief: See that you do not

despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father."

Devotion to the angels began to develop with the birth of the monastic tradition. Saint Benedict gave it impetus and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the great 12th-century reformer, was such an eloquent spokesman for the guardian angels that angelic devotion assumed its current form in his day.

Inevitably though despite the presence of the angels, God does allow evil to be present in the world. He does not will it, but it is tolerated. So how then can we confront it? I'd suggest we can take a page from the angels and emulate them as messengers of hope.

Certainly evil is permitted to continue in the world by God, but this does not mean He is absent from it. Remember, He suffered along with us and was victimized by evil too, dying for us. But this does not mean that we are alone in the world. Indeed, angels do watch over us, but we also see angels in the flesh in the sense that from tragedies, we see heroes emerge. And that is something all of us are called to be: a guardian angel in this world. Messengers of hope take various forms.

On the one hand, there are those in uniform. The heroes in our military. The people who are police officers. The firefighters and paramedics. These people do not get the respect that they deserve, and we should honor them, thank them, pray for them, and appreciate all they do for us. When we have an accident, when someone is breaking into our home, or when a family situation is escalating and becoming dangerous, they are the first people on the scene to bring peace to it. They are true guardian angels in a dangerous world.

But we also must remember that we are called to that role as well. Sin is ugly, and there is no escaping the reality of evil. As such, we need to do something about it and be guardian angels too for people in the world, especially children and vulnerable adults.

Certainly on the one hand, any time we suspect abuse, we must get involved and alert authorities. It's always better to err on the side of caution, and that phone call to the police could save a life.

More often than not though, it's the things that go on daily where we need to use fortitude to act to get involved, something I touched on last week in talking about the Gospel where Jesus spoke of the importance of guiding children in the right way. With respect to children, we need to be aware to what kids go through at school, when there is bullying going on, when a child may be exposed to pornography, or dealing with an overbearing parent at sporting events. We also need to not fear talking about our faith and morals to others, especially in political season when politics and moral theology cross paths. And when we see someone battling addiction or making poor choices, we need to talk to them if we love them. Remember the spiritual works of mercy to admonish the sinner and instruct the ignorant. Indeed our "Cemetery of the Innocent" that volunteers helped put out is a testament to this; a message to the world to think

about abortion and those impacted and to chose life. The list really is endless, but that's why God gives us a conscience that tells us "you need to do something." All of us are, like angels, messengers but we have to do our job and deliver the message in our world.

There will always be evil in the world. But if you've seen guardian angels depicted in art, they are often pictured walking with children through a journey, and that needs to be all of us. When we do the right thing, we can truly combat evil with good. Jesus also wants us to be like angles, so let's do that by being aware of what people deal deal with, and when we see threats, do something about them rather than remain silent.

Have a blessed week!

Fr. Paul

PS - If you don't have it memorized, consider praying this prayer often. Clip it out, put it in your prayer book or Bible, or say it before bed or going out to start your day.

St. Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle.
Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,
and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly hosts,
by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan,
and all the evil spirits,
who prowl about the world
seeking the ruin of souls. Amen. .