



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

The gift of God's angels

In March, we begin the celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the establishment of the Diocese of La Crosse. During these months, the bulletin inserts will focus on ways in which God continues to pour forth His grace upon us in this diocese as He remains ever faithful in His particular love for us.

The prayer card for the 150th Anniversary includes a stained glass window of an angel from the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman. One of the ways that God has blessed us, that we sometimes fail to recognize, is the gift of His holy angels. In our culture, we tend to think of angels as little decorative cherub ornaments rather than the powerful spiritual beings that in reality they are. Further, a surprising number of people incorrectly believe that when human beings die they become angels.

Based upon historical events in the Bible and our Catholic Tradition handed down from the Apostles, the Church teaches that we are surrounded by the watchful care and intercession of angels. Angels glorify God without ceasing and serve His saving plans for the benefit of us all.

Angels are spiritual beings without bodies. Even though angels do not have bodies, they are persons. Angels are servants and messengers of God. "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to

life." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, hereafter CCC, paragraph 336) It may not have occurred to us that angels, in their role as messengers of God, provide guidance for us in knowing God's will for a particular situation. Further, angels are called "mighty ones" who will not die, as "the splendor of their glory bears witness." (CCC 330-331) There is a "multitude of the Heavenly hosts" – their numbers are beyond counting – and tradition tells us they are organized into nine choirs of angels.

We need to grow in our awareness of how angels have been present throughout the history of our salvation. This history reveals all that God has done for us to bring us back into union with Himself since the loss of that union through Original Sin. God desires nothing more than that we receive His boundless love and be saved by Him. Angels, as God's messengers, have announced His ongoing saving action and have served and continue to serve the accomplishment of this plan of God.

Hebrews 13:2 is a Scriptures passage that encourages us to be attentive to the presence of angels. It says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." We should take some time to think back and remember any situations in our lives where we possibly encountered or were directly assisted by an angel(s).

There are numerous references to angelic appearances and their God-ordained activity ("work") throughout the Scriptures – from Genesis to Revelation.

In the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, we see in the Infancy Narratives how God guided Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds through the words of an angel. The angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be the Mother of Jesus, the Savior of the world. Mary was betrothed to Joseph, which means that they were married in the Jewish tradition but did not live together. During this time, it became known that Mary was with child. Joseph was going to divorce her quietly, but "the angel of the Lord" appeared to him in a dream and told him that Mary had conceived this Child through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph was instructed to take Mary into his home and name this Child "Jesus" because "He is the one who is to save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:18-22)

The shepherds, as they watched their flocks of sheep by night, were directed by an angel to go to the City of David to adore the Baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. The angel said that this Child is "Christ the Lord." Then a multitude of angels gave praise and sang to God: "Glory to God in the highest Heaven, and peace to men who enjoy His favor." (Luke 2:8-14)

After the visit of the Magi, Joseph was then directed by an angel in a dream to take Mary and the Child Jesus and escape to Egypt. The angel said, "Stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the Child and do away with Him." (Matthew 2:13-15)

In each of the appearances of an angel to Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds, the angel included the words "Do not be afraid."

It is helpful to step back and acknowledge that there are good angels



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and bad angels and how all this came about. The fallen angels seek the ruin of our souls by tempting us to hate and ultimately to reject God. The Catechism in paragraphs 391-395 explains:

Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil". The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: "The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing."

Scripture speaks of a sin of these angels. This "fall" consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and His reign. We find a reflection of that rebellion in the tempter's words to our first parents: "You will be like God." The devil "has sinned from the beginning"; he is "a liar and the father of lies". It is the irrevocable character of their [clearly understood] choice, and not a defect in the infinite divine mercy, that makes the angels' sin unforgivable.

The reason the Son of God appeared and was crucified and then rose from the dead was to destroy the works of the devil and the other fallen angels. (1John 3:8) The enemy's goal is to seduce us and draw us away from God and ultimately away from the eternal destiny that Christ has purchased for us, that is, to be with Him in unconditional love for all eternity. We are engaged in this continuous battle for our souls. We are strengthened for the battle with the help of God's grace and through the guidance and assistance He provides us through His holy angels for this purpose.

The Catechism explains: The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God's



reign. Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and although his action may cause grave injuries – of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature – to each man and to society, the action is permitted by [God – Who desires only our freedom and salvation, and Who] with strength and gentleness, guides human and cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him." (Romans 8:28)

It is especially comforting that God has assigned to each person a guardian angel

that accompanies us on our journey to Heaven. We are reminded in the "Angel of God" prayer that we can ask our guardian angel for protection, guidance, light and intervention.

As we approach the time of celebrating our 150th Anniversary as a Catholic Diocese, let us intentionally be thankful to God for the gift of His holy angels and ask for their assistance. Let us strive to cooperate with the gifts they provide us to ensure our destiny of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

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