
“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”

In this liturgy on earth we share “the holy things” in the “Communion of Saints” also with the Angels. That is the reason, why we call the Eucharist also “*the bread of angels, bread from heaven*” (CCC 1331).

This life is just the beginning. It reaches its fulfillment in eternal glory, as the Church confesses in the “Prayer of Commendation” of the parting soul:

“May you live in peace this day, **may your home** be with God in Zion, with Mary, the virgin Mother of God, with Joseph, and all the angels and saints.... May holy Mary, the angels, and all the saints come to meet you as you go forth from this life. ...” (CCC 1020).

For this is

“**Heaven** ... the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, ... [is] *this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed - is called ‘heaven’.*” (CCC 1024).

Having the angels so close to us already, it should not surprise us that the Church accepts even images of the invisible, “spiritual, non-corporeal beings” (CCC 328):

“Following the divinely inspired teaching ... **venerable and holy images** of our Lord ..., our inviolate Lady, the holy Mother of God, and the **venerated angels** ... whether painted or made of mosaic or another suitable material, are to be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on sacred vessels and vestments, walls and panels, in houses and on streets” (CCC 1161; cf. 2130).

4. Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

This glance through the different references on the angels shows us their ministry and life in the Mystical Body of Christ, their part in the “Communion of Saints”. They make us aware of the greatness of the children of God, our dignity, our priestly responsibility; moreover, they are disposed to help us as “fellow-servants” (cf. Rev 22:10). Let’s go ahead, then, like the Good Shepherd with a good example and invite them to be part of every activity of our life at all times. We will discover a new life, that is closer to God and easier to live.

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CHRIST’S PRIESTS UNITED WITH THE HOLY ANGELS IN THE CHURCH

“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”



Association of Priests In Opus Angelorum®

Reading the Catechism (III)

Vol. XVII, October 2011

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

We mentioned in the last two letters that in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we have about 40 references beyond the principal block of doctrine on created spirits (good angels: 328-336, and 350-352; evil spirits: 391-395 and 414-415). It is fitting to advert to several main points of doctrine before turning to the “meditations on the angels” in the New Testament.

The angels are purely spiritual creatures; yet the Son of God made man – namely, with a body, is “the center of the angelic world”. The intrinsic unity of the Bible (cf. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 39-41) requires that we read the many references on the angels in the Old Testament (cf. CCC # 332) in view of Christ, “the good news... things into which angels long to look” (1Pt 1:12; cf. Eph 1:9-10). Then we read that “the whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of angels (cf. Acts 5:18-20...)” (CCC 334). This opens the vast field of angelic activity for which we ought to become more and more familiar in order to work more consciously together with them – a goal which God wants us to see and to live and to which the spiritual battles of our times urge us compellingly.

1. The work of the angels in the Church

In their trial the holy angels submitted to the unquestionable authority of God; they accept to serve their Lord and God as man, yes, they unconditionally chose to serve Him in any way He would choose to orchestrate his life on earth. The acceptance of this sovereignty is described in these terms:

“**Christ’s** Ascension into heaven signifies his participation, *in his humanity*, in God’s power and authority. Jesus Christ is Lord: he possesses all power in heaven and on earth. He is ‘*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion*’, for the Father ‘has put all things under his feet’ (Eph 1:20-21). Christ is Lord of the cosmos and of history. In him human history and indeed *all creation* are ‘set forth’ and transcendently fulfilled (cf. Eph 1:10, 4:10)” (CCC 668).

It is the Holy Spirit, who through His ministering angels, has proclaimed Jesus as the Christ (cf. CCC 695). He calls all peoples to come to Christ. The holy angels not only proclaimed the mystery of Christ, but share in His mission, and so followed our Lord down into the depth of creation to serve Him and those who are called to salvation in Christ.

The love whereby God chose also to enrich even the physical creation is a mystery, we also confess in faith: “creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8,20).

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The reprobate angels not only rejected God’s authority in a general fashion and also specifically in terms of the ingathering of all things in Christ. This ingathering or recapitulation takes place in and through the Church. Hence we are not surprised to learn in the *Catechism* that the Church was God’s first intention, the union of all in Him:

“The **Church** is the goal of all things (cf. St. Epiphany), and *God permitted such painful upheavals as the angels’ fall* and man’s sin only as occasions and means for displaying all the power of his arm and the whole measure of the love he wanted to give the world: ‘Just as God’s will is creation and is called ‘the world,’ so his intention is the salvation of men, and it is called ‘the Church.’ (Clement of Alex.)” (CCC 760; cf. 1).

This incredible mystery becomes even more tangible when we see it applied to individual souls.

2. The work of the angels in the souls

The Catechism cites St. Augustine when articulating this truth of the faith:

“**Justification** is the most excellent work of God’s love made manifest in Christ Jesus and granted by the Holy Spirit. It is the opinion of St. Augustine that ‘the justification of the wicked is a greater work than the creation of heaven and earth,’ because ‘heaven and earth will pass away but the salvation and justification of the elect... will not pass away.’ (St. Augustine, In John 72,3). He holds also that *the justification of sinners surpasses the creation of the angels in justice*, in that it bears witness to a greater mercy” (CCC 1994).

By nature, then, the angels are the highest of all creatures.

a) Our constitution in grace

But the love of God has been more than abundantly poured out on mankind, the lower order of creatures. This may be because mankind has less to offer to Him, and so His condescension on their behalf is an even greater manifestation of mercy. This is described by the *Catechism* in two steps: first, man by his intellectual nature is linked in a certain way TO the angels (cf. CCC 2566). In another way man surpasses them by grace. By joining us to Himself in our human nature, Christ associates us more intimately with His redemptive work and grants us in a certain way a more intimate share in his filial relationship with his Father:

“*The personal relation of the Son to the Father* is something that man cannot conceive of nor the angelic powers even dimly see: and yet, *the Spirit of the Son grants a participation in that very relation to us who believe* that Jesus is the Christ and that we are born of God (cf. 1Jn 5:1)” (CCC 2780).

b) The economy in grace

Due to this immense grace, the Church observes in her teaching a double movement in prayer,

“the first ‘magnifies’ the Lord for the ‘great things’ he did for his lowly servant and through her for all human beings (cf. Lk 1:46-55), the second entrusts the supplications and praises of the children of God to the Mother of Jesus, because she now knows the humanity which, in her, the Son of God espoused” (CCC 2675).

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The preface to the Magnificat is the Ave Maria, which has taken its form from the annunciation by the angel Gabriel and the response of Elisabeth at the Visitation:

“This twofold movement of prayer to Mary has found a privileged expression in the Ave **Maria**: Hail Mary [or Rejoice, Mary]: *the greeting of the angel Gabriel opens this prayer*. It is God himself who, through his angel as intermediary, greets Mary. Our prayer dares to take up this greeting to Mary with the regard God had for the lowliness of his humble servant and to exult in the joy he finds in her (Lk 1:48; cf. Sof 3:17)” (CCC 2676).

Here lies the seed for the different considerations of the angels as leaders guiding us to Mary, who is “exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things” (CCC 966). They knew her first as the Mother of God and became her devotees and strongest defenders.

Grace establishes – in the final analysis – an incomprehensible union with God, from which nothing good should be excluded. This applies, for example, to marriage, the one blessing not lost in original sin. The angels see it as a reflection of Christ’s union with the Church and as a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb. Therefore, they are disposed to serve this institution. We read in the Catechism:

“How can I ever express the happiness of a **marriage** joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, **announced by angels**, and ratified by the Father?... (Tertullian, ux. 2,9)” (CCC 1642).

The ground laid in the Incarnation by grace leads man even to a form of union with God which is not even known to the angels:

“**Priests** have received from God a power that he has given neither to angels nor to archangels... God above confirms what priests do here below” (St. John Chrysostom; CCC 983).

Or, as St. Gregory of Nazianzus put it:

“[Who then is the **priest**? He is] the defender of truth, who stands with angels, gives glory with archangels, causes sacrifices to rise to the altar on high, shares Christ’s priesthood, refashions creation, restores it in God’s image, recreates it for the world on high and, even greater, is divinized and divinizes” (CCC 1589).

Again, there are many places in Scripture which testify the service of the Angels to the priests of Christ (cf. Acts 5:18-20; 8:26-29; 10:3-8; 12:6-11; 27:23-25).

3. The work of the angels in the liturgical life of the Church

Priests are called, first of all, to offer sacrifices (cf. Heb 8:1ff; CCC 1566), and to lead the faithful into sharing the one sacrifice of Christ, the eternal High-priest. At the end, all life in the presence of God has to be a life in GOD and through Him with the angels and saints. God enables us to bring Him pleasing sacrifices:

“In the **earthly liturgy** we share in a foretaste of that *heavenly liturgy* which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims... *With all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory* to the Lord; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them [angels and saints]... (II Vat., Sac. Concilium, 8; cf. Lumen Gentium 50)” (CCC 1090).