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“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”

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# Association of Priests In Opus Angelorum®

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Priests and the “Angels of Bethlehem” (cf. Lk 2:13f) XXI, Nov./Dec. 2015

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## Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

Entering the end of the Liturgical year and approaching the new liturgical cycle, we want to continue our meditation on “the Angels of Bethlehem”. According to many Fathers of the Church, we priests are placed at the side or among the angels with our mission. When we hear, therefore, — in addition to their illuminating ministry in behalf of the Incarnation of the Son of God — from their adoring presence, we need to delve into this aspect more deeply, for a good part of mankind has forgotten what it really means to adore GOD-made-Man.

### 1. “A multitude of the heavenly host”

After the Angel announced to the shepherds out in the field “to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord,” “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests!’” (Lk 2:13-14).

#### a) “Glory to God in the highest!”

This multitude sings “Glory to God in the highest!” They are singing it not up in the heavens, but down here below on earth, in the dark of night and in the cold out in the fields. It is a very short expression of what GOD really “merits”; it gives us a weak idea of how glorious He is, how wonderful, beautiful and perfect! He is Beauty in Himself, and this because He is Goodness itself. And He is good because He is Love, three in One and thus sharing and giving. In Him is no narcissistic “me” but “we” because there is just the “You!”, the Divine “Other” in God. And this flows over to the “you”, namely, to creatures, His creatures, the angels and mankind.

The angels are captivated by Him, speak of Him, and praise Him: “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,” “wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Ap 4:11; 5:12) The angels don’t deviate from this blissful glance fixed on GOD’s infinite beauty and perfection, even while on mission as in Bethlehem.

#### b) Also on mission ...

Pope Benedict recalls that “Pope Gregory the Great, in one of his homilies, once

said that **God’s angels**, however far away they go on their missions, **always move in God**. They remain always with him. And while speaking about the angels, Saint Gregory thought also of bishops and priests: wherever they go, they should always ‘be with him’.” (in Altoetting, Germany Sept. 11, 2006) When we priests are, like the angels, out on mission, we need also to be aware that we too start out from a “home” that is God and the Church. There we were formed through the education in the seminary, namely “to live in an intimate and unceasing union with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit” (Vat. II, *Optatam Totius*, 8), we received the priestly character at ordination, the conformation with Christ, for our priestly mission sent by the bishop or superior.

To stay “home”, God leaves this up to us through our daily home-coming and being “accustomed to adhere to Him as friends, in an intimate companionship,” seeking Christ again and again “in the *faithful meditation* on God’s word, in the *Eucharist* and in the *divine office*” (OT 8). These exercises then help us, when “on mission”, to see the many different tasks as ultimately just one, namely, to give “Glory to God in the highest!”, because all our tasks are ordered toward the one, final and perpetual goal, like secondary causes in view of the last and final goal, the glorification and our happiness in God.

## **2. “... and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests!”**

Then the angels added “and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests,” or “with men – en anthropois” - “of good will” as “eudokia” was formerly translated in the vulgate version, “pax in hominibus bonae voluntatis”.

### **a) Peace on earth**

“Peace” is found where every good thing is in its place and no further effort or movement is necessary; peace is – according to the famous definition of Saint Augustine – “tranquilitas ordinis,” the calm and tranquil rest when everything is in its place.

We find considerable movement within the manifold composition of our human nature: to begin with, we are already composed of two distinct realities, body and soul. As a result, we possess many faculties, each with its own capacity and specific aim. Yet, “in the beginning” they formed a harmonious “all” or a “whole” through the gift of Integrity by means of which we were focused on God as our original and main goal in life. Then through sin this order was disturbed; man gave some faculties with their specific but partial goal more emphasis than was due and thus there awoke an urge to dedicate more attention to such subordinate goals than the harmony of the total permitted. Indeed, these very limited goals demanded inordinately to govern over the others and thus caused sinful confusion in man’s life. St. Paul referred once to this with these words: “their god is the belly” (Phil 3:19).

The angels announced to mankind, thus divided, inasmuch as having fallen into sin and “split” in various directions, the birth of his Savior: He is here, present, the Redeemer is “at the door” offering salvation, much like the urge to sin lay crouching at Cain’s feet (cf. Gen 4:7; Tob 5:4). Sin, for a brief moment exalts man with a

self-proclaimed royalty, but in the end casts him into the restless chaos of the pit; the message of the incarnation calls man to humble himself at the foot of the manger, to adore him, the King of Peace, Who has abased Himself for a moment in history, in order to exalt us to a perpetual share in His peace.”

**b) “praising God and saying”**

Because of our union with God and with the holy angels our each and every word — in the confessional, on the pulpit or on the phone, each gesture on the altar or in the parking lot, even every thought — should be focused on Christ, for even “in what I think ... my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse” (Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, # 48). Everything I think, say, do and achieve should originate in the union with Him, and thus contribute to bring Christ, that is, His peace to men, to our people. “Christophorus, Christ-bearer” is what we are supposed to become daily more and more through the practice of constant prayer and the virtues, in the reception of the sacraments, yes, through our own confessions and through each holy Communion. As “Christ-builders” we are ordained and sent out like St. Paul to bring new members to the Mystical Body through words of faith and the waters of Baptism, by further guidance so that the faithful truly know their identity. What applies to us must apply to all the faithful, each in their own proper way: “you not only belong to Christ but (...) ‘you have become Christ’.” (St. John Paul II, *On the Consecrated Life*, 1996, # 109).

**3. “Let us go”**

“When the Angels departed from them up into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem” (Lk 2:15). These simple people, uncomplicated as they were, understood the invitation and “went with haste, and found” what was told them, “Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger” (Lk 2:16).

**a) Thus preaching today?**

So far we can see a parallel between the angels and us priests. But when we think of the message, one might wonder ... This vocabulary, “Glory” and “God”, in the “highest”, and “peace” on earth with so many wars and so much violence and sins which cry to heaven (cf. Ap 18:5); will people accept such preaching? Will they not ask if we ever hear what is going on in the world...?

Yes, we have heard about, just as the angels accompanied the holy family all the way to Bethlehem, just as the holy angels assisted Joseph in his spiritual struggle before each door upon which he knocked seeking refuge, but behind which he found souls with closed hearts. The angels see the misery much better than all of us can, *but* they have better things to tell than to describe the misery of sin and evil – just as they will after the Resurrection not speak of man’s cruelty and indifference but of Jesus’ mercy and victory!

**b) “Behold, something greater is here” (Lk 11:31)**

There may be something in us which still wants to say, “But!” However, this does not stand against God whose word is the “Yes, yes” of the gospel light and not the “no, no” of pessimism. The holy angels brought this positive message first to sim-

ple, poor, but good-willed people as the shepherds were. In the face of the “no, no” of pessimism and the hardness of heart, the Holy Father Pope Francis does not get tired to oppose to the “culture of the provisional” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, # 62) and the “disposable culture” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 53; *Laudato Si*, 20-22) with the “throwaway” of goods or even the peremptory rejection of “people”, even if they have gone astray in divorce or by abortion. There is no excuse, no “but” which exempts us from preaching the gospel, from carrying out our priestly-angelic mission. To the contrary, we may respond: “**But**, God is greater than all creatures! **But**, God is more powerful than the evil spirits! **But**, God is holier and more beautiful than the ugliness of all sins and disasters.” To this end, God led us to the stable, not to a dingy place, but the place where the purity and beauty of a child and the poverty of “swaddling cloths” and “a manger” as bed (Lk 2:12) are the signs on which we can recognize and identify Him.

The holy angels sing in Bethlehem, sing in a little church in Assisi and also in modern times with St. Maximilian Kolbe in the starvation-bunker because they see and want to tell us that we advance with every minute on our journey to the “Glory of God in the highest” and, in this way, to more and more peace among men on earth.

#### 4. Dear brothers in the Priesthood

Our Mother, the Church, leads us in these last days of the Year to look for the second coming of Christ. While the world says, “it is vain to serve God” (Mal 3:14), we believe that light to vanquish the present darkness can only come from the Creator, from His angelic ministers, from the servants of the Savior of this World, the Church and its priests! Therefore, we cling to our Redeemer, we stay with the holy angels and announce like them and with them the Savior of the World. Albeit many may not believe, but we cannot do less than proclaim the truth – opportunely and inopportunely – Christ, the only hope of the world!

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