



## ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

*The Church in Central and Southern Indiana*

## Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

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### Angels are our companions, guardians, and guides along the path of life

*Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you, to accompany you on the way, so you will not make any mistakes (cf. Ex 23:20).*

Next Wednesday, September 29, we will celebrate the Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, the three archangels specifically named in Sacred Scripture. Three days later, on October 2, we will observe the Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels, our faithful but unseen companions on life's journey.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #328–329, “The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls ‘angels’ is a truth of faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition... With their whole beings the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they ‘always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven’ they are the ‘mighty ones’ who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word.”

As the upcoming feasts illustrate, some angels—such as Michael, Gabriel and Raphael—have played significant roles in the history of our salvation. Other angels are more ordinary, the often unnamed companions who serve as our guardians and guides as we journey through life on our way to heaven. “As purely spiritual creatures,” the Church teaches, “angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness” (CCC #330).



The Archangel Michael is described in the Book of Revelation (12:7–12) as a warrior who combats the Devil and all the forces of evil. Pope Francis has said that the devil is our archenemy: “Troubling our lives, he always tries to seduce [us] as he seduced our mother Eve”. “This is mine” are the very words of the devil, the pope teaches. He wins us over with seduction and then accuses us before God: “This [one] is mine, I will take him with me,” the devil says. “Michael fights against him,” the Holy Father teaches, because the “Lord asked him to fight the Devil for us on our life’s journey towards heaven. St. Michael the Archangel helps us to fight against the Evil One and to not be seduced or deceived by him.

Pope Francis tells us that the Archangel Gabriel “is the one who brings the good news, the one who brought the news to Mary (cf. Lk 1:26-38), Zachariah (Lk 1:5), and Joseph (cf. Lk 1:26-38).” He is therefore the messenger of the “good news of salvation.” He too is with us and helps us along our journey, especially when, as often happens, “with so much bad news or news with no substance, we forget the good news, the message of the Gospel.” It is “Gabriel himself who reminds us of this,” the Holy Father says. St. Gabriel the Archangel is a source of hope and the messenger of joy.

The Archangel Raphael is a companion who takes us by the hand and walks with us on both rough roads and smooth pathways. He helps us with the many things that occur along the journey—the good, the bad and the ugly. We must ask St. Raphael the Archangel to help us not to be tempted to take the wrong step, to take the wrong path, Pope Francis tells us. “Angel of God, guide us along the right path, we pray. You are our traveling companion as you were once the traveling companion of Tobias” in the Book of Tobit (12:15). St. Raphael the Archangel brings healing, comfort and confidence to us as we journey to our heavenly homeland.

In addition to these great witnesses, the Angelic Messengers sent by God at key moments in the creation, redemption and sanctification of God’s people and our world, each of us is blessed with a personal companion, a guardian angel, who accompanies us throughout our life’s journey. As Pope Francis reminds us, “According to Church tradition, we all have an angel with us, who guards us, who whispers in our ears and makes us hear things.” Our guardian angel is a personal messenger from God, a protector and guide whose whole purpose is to lead us safely to heaven.

Our Holy Father tells us that the inner voice that counsels us to choose the right path, and to avoid the many obstacles we encounter in life, is really “the voice of our travel companion,” our own Guardian Angel. We can be “certain that he will lead us to the end of our life with his advice,” the pope says. This is why it is necessary to “hearken to his voice, do not rebel against him”. On the other hand, Pope Francis teaches, “rebellion, the desire to be independent, is something that we all have: it is arrogance itself, which our father Adam had in the earthly paradise. Do not rebel, follow his advice!”.

In truth, Pope Francis affirms, “no one walks alone, and none of us can think he is alone: this companion is always there”. Of course, it happens that “when we don’t want to listen to his

advice, to hear his voice, we tell him: ‘Go away!’”. But “it’s dangerous to drive away our travel companion, because no man, no woman can advise him/herself: I can give advice to another, but I cannot advise myself.” In the final analysis, the pope says, it is the Holy Spirit who advises us, it is the angel—God’s Messenger—who advises us, and this is something we all desperately need if we are to remain on life’s straight and narrow paths.

In his morning meditation on the Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, Thursday, October 2, 2014, Pope Francis offered the following reflection:

*Do you speak with your angel? Do you know the name of your angel? Do you listen to your angel? Do you allow yourself to be led by hand along the path, or do you need to be pushed to move?*

*Our angel is not only with us; he also sees God the Father. He is in relationship with Him. He is the daily bridge from the moment we arise to the moment we go to bed. He accompanies us and is a link between us and God the Father. The angel is the daily gateway to transcendence, to the encounter with the Father: that is, the angel helps me to go forward because he looks upon the Father, and he knows the way. Let us not forget these companions along the journey.*

As we celebrate the feasts of the great Archangels (Michael, Gabriel and Raphael) and of the daily companions who serve as Guardian Angels to each of us, let’s remember to give thanks and praise to our Triune God who watches over us and who never abandons us even when we stray from the paths laid out for us in Sacred Scripture and the teachings of our Church. May the Holy Angels protect, guide and accompany us as we strive to follow Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

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## **Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition**

### **I. THE ANGELS**

The existence of angels - a truth of faith

328 The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls "angels" is a truth of faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition.

## Who are they?

329 St. Augustine says: "'Angel' is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is 'spirit'; if you seek the name of their office, it is 'angel': from what they are, 'spirit', from what they do, 'angel.'"<sup>188</sup> With their whole beings the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they "always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" they are the "mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word".<sup>189</sup>

330 As purely spiritual creatures angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness.<sup>190</sup>



## Christ "with all his angels"

331 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. ... "<sup>191</sup> 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."<sup>192</sup> 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?"<sup>193</sup>

332 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.<sup>194</sup> Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Precursor and that of Jesus himself.<sup>195</sup>

333 From the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of the Word incarnate 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.'"<sup>196</sup> Their song of praise at the birth of Christ has not

ceased resounding in the Church's praise: "Glory to God in the highest!"<sup>197</sup> They protect Jesus in his infancy, serve him in the desert, strengthen him in his agony in the garden, when he could have been saved by them from the hands of his enemies as Israel had been.<sup>198</sup> Again, it is the angels who "evangelize" by proclaiming the Good News of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection.<sup>199</sup> They will be present at Christ's return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgment.<sup>200</sup>

### **The angels in the life of the Church**

334 In the meantime, the whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of angels.<sup>201</sup>

335 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. . ."]). Moreover, in the "Cherubic Hymn" of the Byzantine Liturgy, she celebrates the memory of certain angels more particularly (St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. Raphael, and the guardian angels).

336 From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession.<sup>202</sup> "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life."<sup>203</sup> Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God.

*Photo credit: St. Michael the Archangel by Nick Ring, Personal Collection, Ring Studios, Greenville, SC and Jasper, IN*

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### **A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope**

We all have an angel who is always beside us, who never abandons us and helps us not to lose our way. And if we know how to be like children we can avoid the temptation of being self-sufficient, which leads to arrogance and even to extreme careerism.

The Book of Exodus (23:20-23a) proposes the image of the angel that the Lord gives to his people to help them on their journey. It reads, in fact: "Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared."

Life is a journey that leads us to the place that the Lord has prepared. But no one walks alone: no one! Because no one can walk alone. And should one of us believe he is able to walk alone, he would be greatly mistaken and would fall into that mistake, so harmful, which

is arrogance: believing that one's self is great. He would also end up having that attitude of "sufficiency" that leads one to say: "I can, I can do it myself."

Instead, the Lord gives a clear indication to his people: "Go, you will do what I tell you. You will journey in your life, but I will give you help which will

continuously remind you what you must do". And thus he tells his people what the attitude with the angel should be. The first recommendation is: "Give heed to him". And then, "hearken to his voice, do not rebel against him." Therefore, in addition to "respect" one must also be able to "listen" and "not rebel".

(A selection from Pope Francis, MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ, "We all have an angel," Thursday, 2 October 2014.)



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## My Prayer for You

Merciful Father, you send your holy angels to be our companions, guides and protectors on the road to life eternal. May we gratefully acknowledge and accept the help you offer us through our Guardian Angels. May we always respect them, listen attentively and be open to their wise counsel. Amen.

+ *Charles C. Thompson*