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# GUARDIAN ANGELS

FLORENCE WEDGE



ST. ANTHONY'S GUILD, PATERSON, N. J.

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# **GUARDIAN ANGELS**

**FLORENCE WEDGE**

**ST. ANTHONY'S GUILD  
PATERSON, NEW JERSEY**

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## GUARDIAN ANGELS

### I

#### ARE GUARDIAN ANGELS A REALITY?

ANGELS are pure spirits created by God. The common opinion of theologians regarding the various angelic choirs is aptly summarized by St. Gregory the Great: "We say that there are nine orders of angels, because we know — Sacred Scripture is our witness — that there are Angels, Archangels, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim."

Angels have three offices: to adore God, to act as His messengers, and to watch over man. It is in this latter function that they are known as guardian angels.

It is held by many theologians — though it is not a dogma of faith — that the Creator appoints an angel to guard each soul from the moment it is infused into the body. We are not bound to believe in the assignment of an *individual* guardian angel to each individual soul, but we must hold the general doctrine of the Church that the angels are our appointed guardians.

The Catechism of the Council of Trent is most emphatic in its teaching on the existence of guardian angels: "As parents, if their children have occasion to travel a dangerous and infested way, appoint persons to guard and assist them in case of attack, so does our heavenly Father place over each of us, in our journey towards our heavenly country, angels to protect us by their aid and vigilance, that we may escape the snares secretly prepared for us by our enemies, repel their dreadful attacks on us, and proceed on our journey along the road that leads directly to our end."

And, as the Catechism further states: "The immense advantage springing from the special care and providence of God with regard to men — the administration of which is entrusted to angels, who by nature occupy an intermediate place between God and man — will be clear from the abundant examples with which Holy Scripture supplies us."

#### GUARDIAN ANGELS IN THE SCRIPTURES

The numerous apparitions of angels to the patriarchs and prophets, to judges and kings, to holy women whose praise is told in Holy Writ, testify clearly to their office as messengers of God and their guardianship,

in general, of man. Frequently in the Bible we see angelic spirits standing by the just, defending the tempted and oppressed, offering the prayers of the faithful to the Most High, accompanying the traveler, escorting the souls of the dead to the bosom of their father Abraham.

An angel walked before Abraham when the latter went out of his native country at the bidding of God. To Moses on Mount Sinai the Lord promised to send an angel "to guard you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared" (Exod. 23:20). The Psalmist declared that "the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (33:8). Agar, Lot, Elias, Daniel, Samson's mother, Tobias the younger, St. Joseph, St. Peter, Cornelius and many others named in the Holy Book were personally visited and assisted by angels. Again, angels ministered to Christ after His long fast in the desert. One of them comforted Him in the Garden of Gethsemani.

### CHRIST SPEAKS

We have Christ's own positive doctrine on the existence of guardian angels. On one occasion when His disciples were discussing the ticklish question of superiority in His

kingdom, the Master called and presented a little child to them. He made it plain that His followers were to become as little children if they were to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Then He added a warning: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you, their angels in heaven always behold the face of My Father in heaven." (Cf. Matt. 18:1-10.)

Our Lord knew that always and everywhere — in 60 A. D. as in 1960 A. D.; in Palestine, Paris, Peru, and all over the world — children would be scandalized by adults. Hence Christ's mandate was not regional but universal. It applied as much to the American youngster of today as to the Jewish lad of our Lord's time. It showed unequivocally that each and every soul is angelically guarded.

#### A LIAR SPOKE TRULY

Satan, himself once a great angel until he failed in the test to which God put the angelic beings, has unwittingly given testimony to the existence of guardian angels.

The Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent relates the incident. When Christ had completed His fast of forty days and nights,



the devil came to try his wiles on Him. He took the Saviour to the holy city and set Him upon the pinnacle of the Temple, saying: "If Thou art the Son of God, throw Thyself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning thee; and upon their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.'" (Cf. Matt. 4:1-11.)

Satan gained nothing for himself by quoting the Psalmist. He merely showed that he was aware of the existence of guardian angels. He knew that Christ knew. At the same time, the words quoted from the psalm, neither refuted nor denied by Christ, served in later years to fortify Christian belief in the guardianship of angelic spirits.

### THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

Did the early Christians profess their faith in the existence of guardian angels? Writing to the Jewish Christians in Palestine, St. Paul made frequent references to the angelic hosts. To quote only one: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent for service, for the sake of those who shall inherit salvation"? (Heb. 1:14). Holy Mother Church has found these words so indicative of the

function of the angels that she has inserted them into her Office for their feast day, October 2.

The Apostles must certainly have taught the early Christians to believe in angels in general, and guardian angels. In the very first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, two angels are represented as speaking to the men of Galilee who stood dumbfounded on the spot from which their Leader had ascended to heaven.

In the fifth chapter of the Acts, it is reported how St. Peter and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" were arrested and jailed by the party of the Sadducees. Around midnight an angel opened the doors and let them out with the injunction to "Go, stand and speak in the Temple to the people" (5:20).

In chapter twenty-seven of the Acts, St. Luke quotes the Apostle Paul's account of a shipwreck, in which the great missionary tells how an angel revealed to him that he and all his shipmates would be saved.

"Last night," said St. Paul to his companions on shipboard, "an angel of God I belong to and serve, stood by me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; thou must stand

before Caesar; and behold, God has granted thee all who are sailing with thee.' ”

Another time St. Peter was arrested and jailed by Herod. Custody of “the Rock” was committed to four guards of soldiers, four in each guard — sixteen men in all. Came the night hours, and Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while outside the door sentries guarded the prison. “And behold, an angel of the Lord stood beside him, and a light shone in the room; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ ” Then the chains fell from Peter’s hands. The Apostle put on his cloak and sandals and walked out a free man, leaving the soldiers to their dreams.

Alone and safe at last, Peter exclaimed: “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from the power of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” Then Peter proceeded to the house of the mother of John, surnamed Mark, where many of the Christians were gathered together to pray for his release. Here he was, unfettered and cheerful of face, knocking at the gate!

Rhoda, the servant girl, went out to reconnoiter. So amazed was she to find the

Apostle there that she left him standing outside and rushed in to break the good news to the assembly. No one would believe her. "It is his angel!" they all agreed. (Cf. Acts 12:3-17.)

Note the words *his angel*. Evidently the early Christians firmly believed in an individual angel commissioned to guard and guide each and every human being. Moreover, as it is of interest to note, they seem to have thought that the guardian angel might at times take on the appearance and the voice of his charge. But of chief importance, their reaction on hearing of Peter's liberation gives us most convincing proof of their strong belief in the guardianship of angelic beings.

#### CATHOLIC DOCTRINE ON GUARDIAN ANGELS

The Catholic belief in the existence of heavenly custodians is beautifully expressed in the Catechism of the Council of Trent. The Catechism declares: "To angels is committed by the providence of God the office of guarding the human race, and of accompanying each human being so as to preserve him from any serious harm."

Elaborating on the kind ministrations of our angelic keepers, the Catechism further

tells us that through the guidance of our angels we are saved from the devious wanderings into which our treacherous foe might betray us, to lead us aside from the way that brings us to heaven.

Only God knows the number of assisting and ministering spirits. Are angels really as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore or the drops of water in the ocean, as Father Faber suggests? We mortals have no way of arriving at the approximate number. It may be, however, that God in eternity will reveal what is at present beyond finite human knowledge.

What qualifications must we have in order to be entrusted to an angel? Only one: We must belong to the human race. It is a universal Catholic belief that God regards neither color nor creed in the assignment of His angels to men. Nor does He deprive a sinful soul of their protection. Suárez puts it briefly but fully: "I hold that not the just only, but even sinners; not the faithful only, but the unfaithful; not the baptized only, but the unbaptized, have guardian angels."

## II

### IN PRAISE OF GUARDIAN ANGELS

#### EXAMPLE OF THE SAINTS

St. Thomas Aquinas represents the entire universe as being entrusted to angels. He envisions the billions of stars directed in their courses by the same celestial spirits. It seems to him that no part of our planet is without its appointed warders. Many theologians hold that countries, kingdoms, provinces, districts, cities, churches, schools, and various organizations have their special heavenly protectors assigned to guard them. Passages in the Scriptures mention the angels of the Greeks and of the Persians, as well as the angel who went before the camp of Israel.

We understand, then, how St. Francis Xavier could greet the angels of his beloved India and Japan; why St. Ignatius Loyola saluted the angels of people who passed him on the busy streets; why St. Peter Canisius implored the assistance of the angels of the churches in seeking to influence their parishioners for good.

St. Bernard, who has been called the panegyrist of the guardian angels, tells the Christian of his time and of the future:

“In every resting place, in every corner, reverence your guardian angel. If you consult faith, it proves to you that the angelic assistance fails not.”

The learned Scriptural scholar St. Jerome exclaimed in wonder at the providential ministry of the angels: “How great is the dignity of the soul, since each one . . . has an angel assigned to watch over it.”

St. Ambrose explicitly declares that angelic ministration begins with conception, not with actual birth or subsequent baptism. According to this renowned bishop who baptized the repentant Augustine: “Every soul, at the moment it is infused into the body, is entrusted into the keeping of an angel.” And the saint adds, “We should pray to the angel who is given us as a guardian.”

In his late teens the future St. Patrick was sent into slavery. Deprived of the strength and consolation he used to derive from confession and Communion, he was frequently visited by an angel while he tended his master’s sheep. In later years the patron saint of Ireland was fond of relating how his heavenly visitant, in all likelihood his personal angel, had so often given him joy and consolation.

The founder of the Passionists, St. Paul of the Cross, whose eloquence drew throngs to the churches where he was scheduled to preach, was often assisted by angels. His hearers, it is said, actually saw an angel whispering into his ear inspiring his words.

Among women saints whose devotion to their guardian angels has been underscored by their biographers, we shall here mention three. St. Frances of Rome, wife, mother, and, after her husband's death, a religious, was granted the privilege of the visible presence of her guardian angel and conversation with him. The Collect of the Mass for her feast day, March 9, stresses this rare favor: "O God, who among other gifts of Thy grace, hast honored Thy blessed servant Frances with the familiar companionship of her guardian angel: grant we beseech Thee, that helped by her prayers we may merit to attain to the company of the angels. Through our Lord."

Closer to our own time, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus was brought up by God-fearing parents to have special love and reverence for the angel commissioned to guide and guard her. "Knowing how weak a child I am," the Little Flower wrote



poetically, "by thy strong hand thou guidest me."

There is no denying that the Lily of the Pontine marshes, St. Maria Goretti, was very dear to and devoted to her guardian angel. The little girl kept her soul unsullied because it was confided to a Queen and her angelic court. Maria Goretti's conscience and her ever-vigilant angel whispered "No!" into her ear when the tempter tried to seduce her. So accustomed was the child to follow these admonitions and the promptings of divine grace that she did it even when obedience meant fourteen deathly stabs from a depraved youth.

#### VOICE OF THE CHURCH

The Feast of the Guardian Angels holds the rank of a double of the first class and is observed on October 2. It was extended to the whole Western Church by Pope Clement X, who also approved the traditional devotion to the guardian angels.

The Mass of the Holy Angels is replete with references to their kind ministry in favor of mankind.

The Collect extols the "unspeakable providence" of God, who has been pleased to

send His angels to guard us, and requests "that we may ever be defended through their protection, and enjoy their companionship forevermore."

The Epistle for the feast is taken from the twenty-third chapter of the Book of Exodus. Although referring primarily to the guardian angel of the people of Israel, it is equally applicable to each and every guardian of times past, present, and future: "Thus saith the Lord God: 'See, I am sending an angel before you, to guard you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared. Be attentive to him and heed his voice. Do not rebel against him, for he will not forgive your sin. My authority resides in him. If you heed his voice and carry out all I tell you, I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes. My angel will go before you.'"

In the Gradual are found the inspired words of the Psalmist, which have lost none of their beauty and significance through being quoted in part by Satan at the temptation of Christ in the desert. "God hath given His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Alleluia,

alleluia. Bless the Lord, all ye His hosts: you ministers of His who do His will. Alleluia." (Ps. 90:11-12; 102:21.)

The Gospel for the feast contains the staunch and unassailable proof of the existence of guardian angels found in St. Matthew—it relates in full the incident that led our Lord to declare that the guardian angels always behold the face of the Father in heaven (Matt. 18:1-10).

The Secret and the Postcommunion express our confident hope that we may, by the aid of our guardian angels, be delivered from present dangers and the snares of the enemy, be strengthened against every peril, and finally receive the inheritance of eternal life.

#### OTHER PRAYERS

Holy Mother Church does not limit her invocation of the angels to a feast day in autumn. In the Prayer that comes at the close of the Asperges she asks almighty God to "vouchsafe to send Thy holy angel from heaven to guard, cherish, protect, visit, and defend all those that are assembled together in this house."

Again, in the Office of Compline, the liturgical evening prayer, the Church invokes

the help of the heavenly spirits. Brief but eloquent, the Prayer at the close of Compline reads: "Visit, we beseech Thee, O Lord, this dwelling, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy. Let Thy holy angels dwell herein, to keep us in peace, and let Thy blessing be always upon us."

Likewise, the Church has enriched the following prayer with an indulgence of three hundred days (and a plenary indulgence once a month, under the usual conditions):

Angel of God, my guardian dear,  
To whom His love commits me here;  
Ever this day be at my side  
To light, to guard, to rule, and guide.

#### VOICES FROM ROME

Many Popes could be quoted at this point. A great number have in encyclicals, homilies or addresses made direct reference to the guardianship of the holy angels.

Pope Pius IV emphasized one function of angels that will be treated at length in another part of this work. "Both the saints and angels," declared the Roman Pontiff, "offer up to God the prayers of the saints, that is, of the faithful upon earth." Elsewhere the same Vicar of Christ affirmed:

“It is the will of God that we should have a religious veneration for these heavenly guardians.”

Some years ago the late Pope Pius XI spoke to an audience on the Feast of the Guardian Angels. He reasserted his own devotion to his guardian angel and explained its salutary effects upon his whole life. “We wish to stress in particular as an act of gratitude that we have always experienced the wonderful help of our guardian angel. We have often felt his very presence.

“The conviction that we are protected by a prince of the heavenly army, by one of those chosen spirits of whom Christ said that they always see the face of God — this conviction fills us with reverence, devotion, and firm confidence. . . . This salutary thought of St. Bernard was impressed on our mind by our mother early in life — as soon as we were able to understand it. This conviction supported us in all things we have accomplished in our life with the help of God’s grace, and it will certainly be our support in the remaining part of life which God will grant us.”

## VOICE OF LITERATURE

Secular literature does not seem a likely place to find references to the angels whose function it is to guard and keep us. Still, a good many lay writers have in both prose and verse declared their personal belief in guardian angels.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare has a line saying: "Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!" In his *Othello* we read, "Curse his better angel from his side, and fall to reprobation."

Samuel Rogers in *Human Life* mentions "a guardian angel o'er his life presiding, doubling his pleasures and his cares dividing." Watts in his *Cradle Hymn* says, "Holy angels guard thy bed."

The poet Edmund Spenser wrote of the invisible guardians of men:

How oft do they their silver bowers  
leave,  
And come to succor us that succor  
want!  
How oft do they with golden  
pinions cleave  
The flitting skies, like flying pur-  
suisant,  
Against foul fiends to aid us  
militant!

They for us fight, they watch and  
duly ward,  
And their bright squadrons round  
about us plant —  
And all for love, and nothing for  
reward.  
O, why should heavenly God to  
men have such regard?\*

Belief in guardian angels antedates even the Christian era. It flourished among the Persians, Greeks, and other peoples in Old Testament times. And some seven hundred years before Christ came to complete divine revelation, we find the Greek didactic poet Hesiod expressing, in terms of his own mythology, an idea of heavenly guardians which may well be a lingering racial memory of aboriginal truth:

The ministers of good and guards of man,  
Veiled with a mantle of aerial night,  
O'er earth's wide space they wing their  
hovering flight,  
Dispense the fertile treasures of the ground,

---

\*The *Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto viii, stanza 2.

And bend their all-observant glance around;  
To mark the deed unjust, the just approve,  
Their kingly office, delegate from Jove.\*

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\**Works and Days*, Part I.



### III

#### *GUARDIAN ANGELS IN ISRAEL*

##### TOBIAS AND RAPHAEL

The classic illustration of the gracious guardianship of the angels is contained in the Book of Tobias. Holy Mother Church has frequently used this episode to depict the good offices performed for us by the angels charged with our welfare.

Tobias, a God-fearing Jew of the city of Ninive, was blinded while helping his fellow exiles and burying their dead. His reaction? He continued "immovable in the fear of God, giving thanks to God all the days of his life" (Tob. 2:14).

It so happened that this gentleman of God had lent ten talents of silver to a kinsman named Gabelus, in the city of Rages. Stricken blind and fearing he might depart from this life (though he was to live yet forty-two years), Tobias instructed his son, named after him, to receive the aforesaid sum of money. At the same time, the father cautioned his son not to go alone, but to find some reputable companion for the journey.

Tobias the younger did not have far to seek. The Scriptures say it in very few

words: "Tobias going forth, found a beautiful young man, standing girded and, as it were, ready to walk." Tobias would have been the last to guess that here might be an angel of God clothed with human form, ready to go all the way with him.

The young Israelite lost no time in asking the stranger whether he knew the road to Rages. The man answered, "I know it: and I have often walked through all the ways thereof, and I have abode with Gabelus our brother." Yet it is not apparent from the details given in the Scriptures that Tobias had so much as mentioned the name of Gabelus!

To Tobias the elder the stranger promised: "I will conduct him thither, and bring him back to thee." As both walked away, the stranger added a final word of assurance: "I will lead thy son safe, and bring him to thee again safe."

Old Tobias did not know how truthfully he was speaking when he told the departing twosome: "May you have a good journey, and God be with you in your way, and His angel accompany you." (Cf. Tob. 5:1-21.)

To appreciate fully the extent of the services rendered by the angel — whose true identity was not yet known to Tobias and

his son — let us quote the younger Tobias: “Father, what wages shall we give him? Or what can be worthy of his benefits? He conducted me and brought me safe again, he received the money of Gabelus, he caused me to have my wife, and he chased from her the evil spirit, he gave joy to her parents, myself he delivered from being devoured by the fish, thee also he hath made to see the light of heaven, and we are filled with all good things through him. What can we give him sufficient for these things?”

Truth to tell, the list of favors received was indeed notable. Neither father nor son knew how to repay the debt incurred. When they began to urge a reward upon him in gratitude, the stranger revealed his identity: “I am the angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the Lord.” (Cf. Tob. 12: 1-22.)

Commenting on the extraordinary blessings showered upon the elder Tobias and his son, spiritual writers are quick to stress the necessity of obedience to the guardian angel. It was the obedience of young Tobias that saved him and procured so many favors for him. The gall of a fish seems most unlikely to have curative powers; but Tobias, who anointed his father’s eyes with the same at

the command of the angel, restored the patriarch's eyesight. The heart and liver of the fish, when placed upon live coals at the command of an angel, were also able to drive "a devil named Asmodeus" from the house in which he had slain Sara's previous husbands. (Cf. Tobias, chapters 6, 11; chapter 3, verse 8; chapter 8.)

## JUDITH

Judith was the widow of Manasses, of the tribe of Ruben. She passed her widowhood in holy seclusion in the city of Bethulia.

To this city came, in conqueror's guise, Holofernes, the general of Nabuchodonosor's armies, with 120,000 footmen and 22,000 horsemen. More than a match for the little city of the children of Israel!

Ozias, one of the rulers, agreed to surrender if within five days God did not send relief to his oppressed district. Now Judith had been chosen by God to liberate His people. When she heard of the possibility of surrender, she put on haircloth and ashes, and prayed the Lord God to come to her aid in dispelling the peril of the Jews.

Then she and her handmaid made their way to the camp of the Assyrians. Captivated by her beauty, Holofernes gave her carte blanche in the precincts of the camp. Also he let her pray undisturbed when she wanted to converse with the God of Israel.

Then one day Holofernes invited Judith to a banquet, at which he was overcome with wine and fell into a deep sleep. Judith tiptoed closer. Here was her chance. "Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel," she prayed. Tiptoeing to the head of the couch, she loosed Holofernes' sword, which hung from a pillar. With undaunted courage she beheaded the general with his own weapon and bore his head to her fellow Israelites. Finding their leader slain, the Assyrians fled like frightened lambs.

Acclaimed by all as "the glory of Jerusalem," "the joy of Israel," and "the honor of our people," Judith gave thanks to God and to God's angel for her victory. She confessed that the angel of the Lord had at every moment sustained her in her perilous undertaking. "As the Lord liveth," she exclaimed, "His angel hath been my keeper both going hence and abiding there, and returning from thence hither." (Cf. Judith, chapters 7-16.)

As she herself sang in her canticle: "The Persians quaked at her constancy, and the Medes at her boldness." With what might is not a frail creature invested when in the custody of angels!

## MOTHER AND SON

Agar, the Egyptian handmaid of Abraham's wife, experienced with her son the protection of an angel of God.

Abraham's wife, Sara, advanced in years, had assumed that she would bear no children and had therefore persuaded her husband to take to himself the handmaid Agar. Later, harassed by her mistress, Agar fled from Abraham's house. In a revelation from heaven she was persuaded to return, being told that Ismael, the son she would bear, was to be the ancestor of a great multitude.

Some years passed and Ismael was now a healthy young boy, the joy and consolation of his mother. In the meantime, Sara too had borne Abraham a son. Fearing that Ismael would share the inheritance of her own son, Sara asked her husband to cast out Agar and her child. Abraham arose early in the morning, gave Agar and the boy some food and drink, and sent them away.

For a while, mother and son wandered aimlessly about in the wilderness of Bersabee. And when they had eaten the last crust of bread and drunk the last drop of bottled water, Agar told Ismael to lie down and rest under the trees. She knew that his strength was spent. "Let me not see the child die," she told her anguished heart as she withdrew some distance — as far as a bow can carry.

Suddenly she heard the thrilling voice of God's angel: "What is the matter, Agar? Fear not, for God has heard the boy's cry in this plight of his." Agar could not believe her ears. What was it the angel was saying? "Rise up, take the boy, be assured in his regard; for I will make him a great nation."

Then Agar saw what she had failed to see before — a well of water! She called her son and gave him to drink; then both went their way refreshed. The angel had saved their lives. (Cf. Gen. 16:1-16; 21:3, 9-21.)

### THE THREE YOUNG MEN

Another beautiful illustration of the vigilance of the ministering angels is found in the Book of Daniel. It concerns the three young heroes of Israel who refused to

adore the golden idol set up by King Nabuchodonosor.

Furious, the royal one commanded the men in attendance to heat a furnace seven times more than usual. This done, the men seized the three young Jews, bound them hand and foot, and pushed them fully clothed into the fiery bath.

And so they perished? Yes, if you mean the men who pushed the trio in, and were overcome by the heat. But not so the God-loving three! Again an angel came to the rescue. Whether he was Sidrach's angel, or Misach's, or Abdenago's or a specially appointed angel is immaterial. The point is: The angel came and delivered them. He went down with the faithful Jews into the furnace of sevenfold heat, drove the licking flames out, and, says the inspired writer, "made the midst of the furnace like the blowing of a wind bringing dew, and the fire touched them not at all, nor troubled them, nor did them any harm."

With reason could the would-be martyrs sing in their *Benedicite*: "O ye angels of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt Him above all forever," for "...He hath delivered us from hell, and saved us out of the hand of death, and delivered us out of the



midst of the burning flame, and saved us out of the midst of the fire."

Even Nabuchodonosor was astonished. What was this? His attendants had cast three men into the furnace, and here was a fourth one! Four were stepping out, not one hair of their head harmed. The king could not but admit that the God of the Israelites had intervened. "There is no other God that can save in this manner," he said. Then he blessed the God of Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago, "who hath sent His angel, and delivered His servants that believed in Him." At the same time, he gave orders that no people, tribe, or tongue should dare speak blasphemy against the God of the three heroes. "Then," the Scriptures relate, "the king promoted Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago, in the province of Babylon." (Cf. Dan. 3:1-97).

How many promotions for eternity we Catholics could make sure of, if we were more devoted to our guardian angels and enlisted their help in the acquisition of the kingdom of heaven! But, unfortunately, we seldom think of those kind spiritual help-mates and friends. Yet every thought of them, however brief, would be productive of good in our souls. Every moment of re-

flection on the presence of the angels would help offset the tendency in every one of us children of Adam to think only down-to-earth thoughts and lead only down-to-earth lives. Thus we who cling to the baubles of this world would learn, slowly, to fix our minds and hearts on eternal things — where they should be fixed if we are really serious about the life to come.

Let us not lose heart if our conscience quotes to us the words of a certain Anglican clergyman: "The good Lord forgive me for that among my other offences I have suffered myself so much to forget as His divine presence, so this presence of His holy angels." Let us rather pause to consider what the angels do for us, and what we should do in return.

## IV

### *GUARDIAN ANGELS HERE AND NOW*

Times may change, but the angels of God do not. There is no inconstancy or fickleness in the discharge of their God-given duty.

What benefits do we derive from being angelically guarded at all times? What do the angels do for us? A glance at the Bible will give us the answer.

#### THEY DELIVER US FROM EVIL

The Scriptures are filled with acknowledgments of angelical protection. So are we in our daily lives constantly helped by our heavenly guardians. If we could but see the other side of the fabric of experiences we are weaving, we would find that our lives are filled with instances of angelic assistance. There is no moment of our existence when we cannot make ours the words of that servant of God Jacob.

Confined to bed by his infirmities, Jacob called his son Joseph to him. Joseph, who knew that this might be his last visit to his father, brought his two sons with him. Old Jacob embraced the boys and placed a hand on the head of each, saying, "The angel

who has delivered me from all evil, bless the boys.” (Cf. Gen. 48:8-16).

As we have said, one of the main occupations of our angels is to shield us from harm to soul and body. As the evil spirits do not sit on the sidelines but are forever needling us to commit sin and trying to ensnare us gullible mortals into inextricable situations, so do the good angels strive in the opposite direction — to lead us to sanctity. In this effort they must often sabotage the schemes of the satellites of Satan. The conflict is not new. It began in the Garden of Eden and will be waged until Armageddon.

In these our days of mushrooming death-clouds, guided missiles, supersonic jets *et al.*, the devil's tactics are no different than in the days when St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the Powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high” (4:12).

But if we have the hardihood to enlist the powerful protection of the spiritual forces of goodness and holiness, we shall not miss our eternal target. We shall see

for ourselves that our angels are truly, as the Catechism of the Council of Trent defines them, the "guardians of our salvation."

Not so many years ago, a French priest by the name of Pierre Lamy experienced this protection of his angel in a unique way. The incident is related in *The Ragpickers' Priest*.\* One wet night Père Lamy was returning from a sick call. Along came a couple of rascals with the idea that it would be fun to run the priest down with their bicycles. Luckily the priest saw them coming and guessed what they had in mind. Hurriedly he whispered a prayer to his guardian angel, whose presence had often helped him in tough spots.

The angel worked fast. Three seconds later the two fellows were mysteriously flung off their bicycles and left to pull themselves out from the muddy ditch as best they could. "And so we went our way" the priest related later. It was characteristic of him never to use the singular "I" when referring to himself. He always used the plural "we," signifying himself and his angel. But the

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\*By Joseph A. Mullins, C. S. Sp. (Cork, Ireland: Mercier, 1946).

point is: Angels can help. They are not winged sissies afraid to act in season.

The angels hold no grudges. Had one of those rascals prayed to his own angel the next morning, he would have been listened to and very probably aided. Angels never fail to do what lies in their power to prevent sin, but they remain fully aware that they cannot force the free will of human beings. Should sin be committed, they do not withdraw their kind ministrations but guard their charges as faithfully and lovingly as before.

When the sinner starts again with a clean slate, we have Christ's word in St. Luke (15:10) that "there will be joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

All those who religiously trust in Him — and those who will not — God in His loving kindness gives into the protective custody of angels. A man falling into sin is not automatically deprived of the presence of his angel. He needs him more than ever, and God knows it.

In another sphere of action, it is highly probable that millions of angels are at this hour co-operating with St. Christopher and St. Joseph of Cupertino in making land and air travel safer for motorists and air pas-

sengers. Angels are interested in keeping us alive for the number of years allotted to us. A prayer to them may heal broken bones—but why not say the prayer before the fracture occurs?

How should we pray? We may recall in the Bible the young Tobias, who, when he was traveling to his kinsman's house, encountered a monstrous fish that was about to devour him. Tobias did not have time to compose a beautiful prayer overflowing with heart-stirring sentiments. Just five words: "Sir, he cometh upon me."

A blunt and undignified prayer, yes. But then, Tobias did not know he was talking to an angel. Five words, and the young Israelite was protected from all harm.

We can pray in the words approved by the Catholic Church. Or we can formulate our own prayers in simple, soul-sprung words. Our angels, who know every language from Aramaic to Zulu, including of course Church Latin and Americanized English, understand every syllable that leaves our lips.

But this is a sorry understatement. They actually help us without our asking. Father Francis Deglman, S. J., writing in *The Queen's Work*, states expressly that, "Normally the angels perform their work

without waiting for our petitions." He explains that their guardianship is something normal and natural, "part of God's providence over us, the higher beings exercising a tutelage over the lower ranks." They do not wait to be entreated. However, they do appreciate a nod in their direction. Possibly they could make theirs the statement of Christ: "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

Angels, to put it in Scriptural parlance, do not give a stone when we need a loaf; nor a serpent when we need a fish; nor a scorpion when we pray for an egg. They hand good gifts to those who ask. And to those who forget to ask.

#### ALWAYS GOING OUR WAY

We have God's word for it. The angels keep us in all our ways. *All* admits of no exception of time or place. We are accompanied by angels from conception to our entrance into eternity.

St. Ambrose does not hesitate to affirm that the angel is confided to his earthly charge at the moment of conception. Then, too, we read in the Scriptures that angels escort the deceased to Paradise. Our angels



are ours from the cradle to the grave — or more specifically, from our conception to our resurrection.

It is true that angels are not flesh-and-blood beings. We cannot see them with our eyes, touch them with our hands, hear them speak to us. The rustle of angelic pinions may reach the ears of the fortunate few; but those few are holier than we could hope to be!

Believing is not always seeing. We never see the cold, but we feel it. The wind is not visible, but surely tangible when we have to face it. We cannot see our soul, but we know we have one. Only the saints see God, but according to a recent *Catholic Digest* survey, ninety-nine percent of all Americans admit His existence. We cannot glimpse the angel at our side, but it takes a skeptic to infer that angels are a Sunday School myth.

God never told a lie. He meant it when He said to the Israelites: "I am sending an angel before you, to guard you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared" (Exod. 23:20). His angels are always at hand, here and now in this present, to guide, guard, help. . . .

## ... AND CONSOLE US

There is no such thing as a cruel angel. God is good and there is a treasury of goodness in every angelic spirit He has created, whether singing His praises or trying to make us behave.

An angel comforted our Lord in the Garden of Olives. We all have our minor Gethsemanis, and can assuredly look for strength and consolation from our guardian angels. An angel cannot see misery or sorrow without being moved to do something about it.

All of us, at some time or other, are bewildered, confused, sick at heart, frustrated, disillusioned. Often we have no sympathetic ear into which to pour the recital of our woes; or we are ashamed to bare our inmost thoughts and reveal the gnawing pain. Why not contact our own personal friend? We could share with our angel our sorrows, problems, anxieties, individual concerns, the events that spell danger ahead. This holy familiarity should characterize those whom God has made "little less than the angels" (Ps. 8:6).

There seems to be no excuse for falling into depression and melancholy when we have within elbow reach a most sympathetic,

understanding, and adequate consoler. Our angels are in dead earnest about helping us.

### THEY OFFER UP OUR PRAYERS

After the Consecration of the Mass, the celebrant bows down profoundly with his hands joined and places them upon the altar, saying: "Most humbly we implore Thee, almighty God, bid these offerings to be brought by the hands of Thy holy angel unto Thy altar above. . . ."

These offerings? The pure, holy, all-perfect Victim, the holy Bread of life eternal and the Chalice of unending salvation.

Why not, when it is our privilege to assist at Mass, commission the same angel to carry to God our prayers, works, and sufferings of the day?

But, you may ask, will my angel do it? Listen to Raphael. He is speaking to Tobias the elder: "When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, and didst leave thy dinner, and hide the dead by day in thy house, and bury them by night, I offered thy prayer to the Lord" (Tob. 12:12).

Our angels carry our prayers to God. Of that there can be no doubt. An angel, says St. Thomas, can be in one place in one instant

and in another place the next instant. But the angels do not offer our prayers as they are; they strengthen our supplications by adding their own. To carry our prayers to the Most High must be one of the favorite occupations of our guardians. Then they are truly, as their name indicates, messengers: intermediaries between God and man.

### INSPIRATION, PLEASE!

Guardian angels play yet another role. They inspire their charges to do good. They exhort the sinner to mend his ways and the just to advance in saintliness.

You have all heard of Father Damien, the heroic apostle of the lepers. Father Damien was fond of relating the story of the non-Christian woman who refused to be converted, but who had to give in at last because her angel took charge of things.

Father was summoned one day to the bedside of this woman. He soon saw that she was possessed by a spirit not her own. When she made signs that she wished to write, the priest handed her pencil and paper. She scribbled: "I am not an evil spirit; I am the guardian angel of this woman. For six months I have been urging her to be con-

verted. Now I am using this violent means. Tomorrow she will be herself again, and will be converted."

Father Damien returned the next day and found the woman's attitude completely changed. Upon inquiry, she admitted that for the last six months she had heard daily an interior voice telling her to become a Catholic. "I always resisted," she said, "but now I am conquered."

If we are mindful of their inspirations, our angels will prompt us to resist no more the calls of grace, but to give in graciously to whatever the divine Conqueror may desire of us.

## V

### WHAT SHALL WE GIVE IN RETURN?

St. Bernard should know what we owe our guardian angels. He sums up our obligations in a dozen words: "Reverence for his presence, devotion for his benevolence, confidence for his care."

#### REVERENCE

When we stop to think that our spiritual custodians are princes of the heavenly court, ambassadors from Paradise, God-elected counselors and guides, we understand why their eloquent champion lists reverence as the top "must."

Reverence is, to coin a term, consecrated courtesy. Reverence made St. John Berchmans always mindful of inviting his angel to enter a room before him. Reverence prompted St. Ignatius of Loyola to greet the angels of people who passed him on the streets. The author knows of at least one religious community where the nuns meeting in corridors bow silently to acknowledge the presence of their angels.

It seems quite proper to recall St. Bernard's words: "In every resting place, in

every corner, reverence your guardian angel"; and "Dare you do before him what you would not dare commit if I saw you?"

In one of his Psalms, grateful David thanks God for His many blessings, adding, "In the presence of the angels I will sing Your praise" (137:1). Inescapably, whatever we do, we do it in the presence of the angels. We can climb to the summit of Everest or sink ten thousand fathoms below sea level; we can pitch our tent in Basutoland, Berlin, or on Broadway — wherever we go, there our angels will guide us and remain with us.

Can we accept it all flippantly and nonchalantly? Reverence, not nonchalance, should be our attitude.

## DEVOTION

From what has been said, it is crystal clear that devotion to our guardian angels is not something that can be lightly dismissed. Devotion to one's guardian angel has never been viewed as an infallible pledge of salvation, but it will help immensely in the attainment of spiritual perfection.

"Of all the larger devotions to the saints and angels," writes Father Deglman, "rec-

commended to everyone by the Church, it seems to me that the most important ones are those to our Blessed Mother and to our guardian angels."

This is definitely no take-it-or-leave-it affirmation. It is a most commendable thing to commit oneself to one's angel very often and very confidently. Provided our requests be consistent with the eternal counsel, we can be certain of our angel's obtaining an answer to our prayers.

Devotion to the guardian angels should be fostered early in children. One little boy used to leave a small space for his angel to his right at table, church, and school. Once when someone pushed him brusquely, he cried out, "Don't crush my angel." The boy later became a priest and made it his purpose to inculcate devotion to the guardian angels in as many souls as he could reach.

#### CONFIDENCE

One little girl used to pray, "Guardian Angel, I place my truck in thee." She meant *trust*, of course, but you know how it is with milk teeth! Trust is confidence. We like people to have confidence in us, to rely upon us, to believe in us. We appreciate



the confidence, implied or expressed, of others in us.

Spiritual bodyguards are like that too. They want us to put our trust in them. More powerful than armies in array of battle, they derive their strength from God and are not dependent on alphabet bombs and suchlike. Favored with the enjoyment of the beatific vision at all times, they want to lead us to a happy eternity. They know the way to God and desire nothing better than to lead us to Him. When we hesitate to follow where they lead, we implicitly show our lack of trust in them.

Confidence in our guardian angels will enable us to walk uncomplicatedly through this complicated life. Heaven knows our confidence will be well placed. Who ever heard of an angel pointing to devious paths or sleeping on the job? Angels are on hand at the precise moment we need them. Did not one of them speed earthward as God's messenger to arrest the arm of Abraham when he was about to kill his son? One second later would have been one second too late. When God sent an angel to free Peter from captivity, the messenger did not suggest that he wait till morning. He did his job in the dead of night. When the angel

was told to warn Joseph to head for Egypt, he did not delay until dawn. He had the Holy Three on the road long before the sun stirred in the East.

"It can't happen here," you say. Agreed. But many things can and do happen for which you and I need something better than our own inadequate prudence and providence. One more reason for pinning our hopes on angels.

## LOVE

Admittedly, God has not told us in so many words to love His angels. This does not mean, however, that love is taboo or undesirable. Even without the aid of grace man tends to love those who love him. How can we go on, then, refusing our affection to a creature of God who is always achieving our own good?

We send thank-you notes when people have been kind to us. We invite them to our house. We remember them at Christmas. We say a prayer for their intentions. We feel affectionate regard for them and express it as best we can. Surely, in the light of their numberless benefits, the angels deserve our loving gratitude.

## OBEDIENCE

A harsh word, obedience. We dislike giving up our own way. We want to cling to our little individual independence. We resent authority, although we know that fundamentally all legitimate authority comes from the Author of our days.

And here we speak of obedience! Remember the younger Tobias. His obedience to the angel called down many blessings upon him, as we have already seen. Things will go well with us, too, if we school ourselves to consider our angels as our best counselors. The more we obey them — the more perfectly we let ourselves be led by them in the ways of God — the more will they assist us and free us from all danger.

In business undertakings it is wise to talk things over with one who knows the score. How often, for instance, a fool and his money are parted because the fool thought he could invest his millions by himself without outside advice. Transpose this to the spiritual sphere. The angels know, so much more than we do, how to love God and serve Him and how we can save our souls. We are fools if we rush in where, on account of Satan and his suite, they warn us there is peril to tread.

## IMITATION

Constantly companioned by angels, we should endeavor to imitate them. We can in our own human way try to emulate their sinlessness, disinterestedness, ready obedience, faithfulness to duty and the other qualities we know they possess. We are well aware that no matter how long or how seriously we try, we shall still fall short of the actually angelic, since, as a result of Adam's turning away from God, we have a strong inclination to sin.

Angels are pure and sinless beings. We, on the other hand, are not confirmed in grace and every one of us is vulnerable to diabolical attack. Sooner or later we, like St. Peter, must be "sifted like wheat" — we are bound to find ourselves being pushed around, teased and pestered by Satan and his sub-officers; while the angels are not even tempted. But we should not be discouraged at this great difference between ourselves and angelic creatures. We must realize that if we try to imitate in our own poor way the sinlessness of the angels, we shall not only gain the happiness of heaven; our purity and avoidance of evil will have a merit which theirs do not.

The angels always see the face of the Father in glory. For us the beatific vision is not available while we walk this earth. But there's a prelude to it: walking in the presence of the All-Holy. It is a habit which our guardian angels are most eager to have us develop. Abraham was given to understand that he would be perfect if he were to walk always in the presence of the Lord. It is a *walk* which actually signifies *running* in the direction of God. No time, no effort lost.

### GIVE THEM A HAND!

Can we help the guardian angels? True enough, our confidence will enable them to help us. But can we help them to help others? It is being done all the time, throughout the length and breadth of America and elsewhere. The mother who conducts her toddler across the busy street; the newsstand owner who removes filthy publications from the buying public; the garage mechanic who does an A-1 job on the broken-down car; the men who sentinel the White House; the guards at Buckingham Palace — all are protecting souls and bodies. They are help-mates of the angels, "angels" to others.

In seeking to do good to any soul, we should first ask the aid of his angel. Many lay apostles have long since found that their clients are more receptive when this important precaution has been taken. When we make men's angels our allies, we can be almost sure of full success.

It is a fine habit, both helpful and proper, to call on our angels to assist those we love. At our least signal they will go wherever we indicate, to comfort and to make their presence effective. Distance does not hamper the ministrations of the angels. St. Thomas tells us that just as our soul can, by taking thought, consider France and then Syria, without ever thinking of Italy, which stands between, so can an angel pass from one point to another without going through the middle. One mile or a million — it is the same to them.

And now, reader, good-by to you both — you and your angel.

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