

## In the hands of the angels

Many of us know about St. Michael as the prince of the heavenly army who cast Satan down from heaven. Of course, St. Gabriel is the one who announced to Mary that God desired to become flesh in her womb. Yet not many of us know about the archangel St. Raphael. In the book of Tobit, St. Raphael is the angel in disguise who is sent in answer to the prayers of Tobit, who was afflicted with blindness and to the prayers of Sarah, who had seven husbands but each of them were killed by a demon before she could ever bear a child with them. At the end of the story after Tobit's sight is restored and Sarah is freed from her demon, St. Raphael reveals himself as "one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One" (Tob 12:15). So on this feast of the Archangels, the Church today invites us to bring the offerings of our prayers, ourselves and even our sufferings into the presence of the Holy One through his angels.

The Gospel today is trying to present us with the particular way in which the angels do this ministry. When Jesus says that "the heavens will be open and you will see the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" he is quoting in Gen 28:11-19 but with a change in a single term. In that passage, Jacob is running away from his brother Esau who was trying to kill him, and as Jacob was taking a break and sleeping on a rock, he has a dream of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder. When he woke up, he realizes that he is at the place where heaven meets earth, and he says "this is the house of God, the gate of heaven", which is a reference to the temple of God, the place where God dwelt. So when Jesus says that the angels of God were ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, a title that refers to himself, Jesus is now saying that he is the new house of God and the gate of heaven. The imagery of the angels ascending and descending is a symbol of communication with God and Jesus is saying that he is the place where heaven meets earth and thus, he is the perfect mediator between God and humanity. Jesus is like the cell tower and the angels are like the text messages that we can send through Jesus to the Father.

Now where do we see the angels of God ascending and descending upon Jesus here and now? Listen to this line in Eucharistic Prayer I: "In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty." What are these gifts? In the mass, the Church desires that the gift we offer through the angels with Jesus is the gift of ourselves. "By offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48). The mass is the fulfillment of what Jesus had prophesized to Nathaniel because in the mass the angels are descending to earth at the liturgy of the Eucharist and then ascending with the gift of Jesus and ourselves united with him. Imagine the great dignity he has given us in allowing us to offer the perfect sacrifice and worship through his Son and with his Son. Imagine that we have been placed in the very presence of his majesty. Yet this is not imaginary dream but a reality in the mass.

God also desires that we offer him the gift of our suffering: he wants us to share in his suffering with him so that he can share his redemption with us and with the whole world. "In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 19). Suffering which used to be senseless is now salvific. Just as Jesus achieved the redemption of the world through suffering, so we too continue his redemption in the world through our suffering united with Jesus. Because we are part of the body of Christ through baptism, our suffering is no longer

our own but it has been fused with Christ's suffering for the redemption of the world. Are any of you suffering? Do you know others who are suffering? The Church invites us to pour out our sufferings into the hands of the angels and unite it with the Cross of Christ and by doing so we unleash an ocean of graces upon those we love to achieve the ultimate redemption and salvation they were created for.

Our Lord told Saint Faustina; *"If the angels were capable of envy, they would envy us for two things: one is the receiving of Holy Communion, and the other is suffering."* (p.1805). Although the angels cannot participate in these two things, they are waiting beside you now with open hands waiting for the offering that you will present to God. Will you let them return empty-handed to the throne of his divine majesty?