

The Feast of the Archangels

September 29, 2016

Revelation 12:7–12b Psalm 138:1–5 John 1:47–51

The liturgy for today celebrates the feast of the three archangels who have been venerated throughout the history of the Church. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. We read the words of Jesus in the Gospel of the Mass:

Very truly I tell you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Why does Jesus refer to himself as the Son of Man? He has in mind the vision presented from Daniel 7 where we read:

***I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a Son of Man
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.***

The angels continually praise God and serve Jesus because they know that his is the everlasting kingdom and is worthy of their service. Because they know this Psalm 103 declares:

***Bless the Lord, O you his angels,
You mighty ones who do his word
Harkening to the voice of his word:***

The angels, in a unique way, do the will of God. They both hear and do God's word because they know who is the true king.

Today's feast is a special opportunity to consider that the Church honours three archangels in the Liturgy by name. The first is Michael the Archangel (Dan 10:13-20; Rev 12:7; Jude 9). The etymology of the word describes the mission of each. 'Mica-El' signifies: Who is like God? Michael appears in Daniel's vision as "the great prince" who defends Israel against its enemies; in the Book of Revelation, he leads God's armies to final victory over the forces of evil. Devotion to Michael is the oldest angelic devotion, rising in the East in the fourth century. The Church in the West began to observe a feast honoring Michael and the angels in the fifth century.

The second is Gabriel, who is connected above all with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God (Luke 1:19,26). The term means Power of God or "My power is God". Gabriel also makes an

appearance in Daniel's visions, announcing Michael's role in God's plan. His best-known appearance is an encounter with a young Jewish girl named Mary, who consents to bear the Messiah.

The third is Raphael, whose name means "God heals". Raphael's activity is confined to the Old Testament story of Tobit. There he appears to guide Tobit's son Tobiah through a series of fantastic adventures which lead to a threefold happy ending: Tobiah's marriage to Sarah, the healing of Tobit's blindness, and the restoration of the family fortune.

Hebrews tells us in the form of a question the Mission of the Angels:

Are they not all ministering spirits sent for service for the sake of those who shall inherit salvation?

That such ministering spirits are necessary is made especially clear in the reading from Revelation. For if ministering spirits are there to serve us, the demonic spirits are there to destroy us. Remember the psalm said that angels both hear and do God's word? The demonic angels will do everything in their power to undermine this. Remember the sly serpent in Genesis asked: "Did God really say"? With the planting of this doubt, disobedience took the place trusting obedience and as a result the demonic power of seduction and accusation entered into the physical world.

We need to understand that it is on earth and not in heaven that the devil has dominion. The Revelation puts it so clearly: "He is the deceiver of the whole world." The world when used by St. John is that realm that is in opposition to God and his kingdom. In Ephesians St. Paul describes the Devil this way:

He is the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons and daughters of disobedience.

Now by contrast, it is the holy angels and the Holy Spirit who are at work in the sons and daughters of obedience. As we choose to follow Jesus as we hearken to the voice of his word and do his word those good ministering spirits will always come to our aid.

However we need to always remember that while we are in this world there is a war waged within the soul of every human being. The devil is always tempting us to answer the question: "Who is like God?" with the answer "We are, and we will overthrow his kingdom" And even though the devil knows his time is short and cannot win, he will try to take as many human souls with him to hell where everyone will hearken to his or her own voice. The song in hell will be "I did it my way"

The angels are always inspiring us to answer the question: "Who is like God" with a resounding "no one is like God" And so the song of heaven is "We did it God's way" Throughout the course of our earthly life those who affirm that no one is like God will be aided by Michael so that God's power, mediated through Gabriel, and God's healing, mediated through Raphael will inspire us to pray with today's Collect:

O God, who dispose in marvelous order ministries both angelic and human, graciously grant that our life on earth may be defended by those who watch over us as they minister perpetually to you in heaven.