



From Deacon Mark Miller's Desk

This has been a busy week for angels on the church calendar. Wednesday, we celebrated the *Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, archangels*. Then on Saturday, it was the *Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels*.

The idea of angels is grounded in our Jewish heritage. The book of Genesis reveals that God placed an angel as a guard over the tree of life after Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. Angels are mentioned in Genesis, Exodus, Samuel, Kings, and Daniel, among other Old Testament books.

Angels were created by God. They are pure spirit; without bodies, they are neither male nor female. Only three angels have names [some traditions have given names to the archangels over the years, but those are human inventions]. God created them before He created the physical world. His first creation was the spiritual world; this is the world of the angels. They are highly intelligent, and as pure spirit, their minds remain wholly focused on their creator. They don't face the distractions that are part of the physical world.

The angels are among God's highest creations; they possess knowledge far beyond our own and have great power. But they still fall short of man. Angels are not created in the image and likeness of God; only humans are so blessed. Christ assumed a human – not angelic – form in order to save humankind through his passion, death, and resurrection. The word "Angel" means messenger, and that is one of the functions of the angels. They are also servants, warriors, and adores of God. Each angel is a personal, unique, immortal being who has chosen to love and serve its creator.

Early Church Fathers developed classifications for angels and taught that the angels have distinct activities and missions. St. Thomas Aquinas developed the structure we use today: three spheres of angels with three orders [sometimes called choirs] in each sphere.

First Sphere

- Seraphim
- Cherubim
- Thrones

Second Sphere

- Dominions
- Virtues
- Powers

Third Sphere

- Principalities
- Archangels
- Angeles [including Guardian Angels]

Our knowledge of archangels comes from the Book of Tobit which tells of "the seven who stand and serve before the glory of the Lord" (Tb 12:15). They are spoken of also in the Book of Revelation. Three of the archangels are the only angels with given names:

- **Michael**, whose name means "who is like God," leads God's armies in the war in heaven against Satan's rebellion" [Revelation 12].
- **Gabriel** is God's herald in both the old and New Testaments. He is the patron saint of messengers, those who work in radio and television, and postal workers.
- **Raphael** first appears as Tobias's [son of Tobit] traveling companion and is again mentioned in John's Gospel. He is considered the patron of travelers, the blind, medical workers, Christian marriage, and Catholic studies.

Guardian angels, individual angels assigned to guide and nurture each human being, are mentioned by Christ in Matthew 18:10, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father." A Guardian Angel's responsibilities aren't limited to children. They watch over their charge always, help them to pray well, and then present their soul to God at their death.

Often, one of the first prayers parents teach their children is the Guardian Angel Prayer: "Angel of God, my guardian dear, To whom His love commits me here, Ever this day be at my side, To light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen."

These two devotions – to the Archangels and Guardian Angles --- are one way we express our faith in, and thanks for, the love and care God extends to each person, day-in and day-out.