

# Creation and the Angels



RCIA Handouts:

Pages:

- |                                |        |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| 1. "St. Michael the Archangel" | 2 – 4  |
| 2. "Choirs of Angels"          | 5 – 6  |
| 3. "Choirs of Angels, Part II" | 7 – 8  |
| 4. "Some Catholic Scientists"  | 9 – 11 |

# St. Michael the Archangel

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**By Fr. William P. Saunders**  
**Herald Columnist**  
**(From the issue of 10/2/03)**

***I have recently moved to the area, and have noticed that several parishes (including my own) recite the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel. Could you explain where this devotion comes from? — A reader in Great Falls***

St. Michael the Archangel, whose name means, "one who is like God," led the army of angels who cast Satan and the rebellious angels into Hell; at the end of time, he will wield the sword of justice to separate the righteous from the evil (cf. Rv 12:7).

The early Church Fathers recognized the importance of the angels and archangels, particularly St. Michael. Theodoret of Cyr (393-466) in his *Interpretation of Daniel* wrote, "We are taught that each one of us is entrusted to the care of an individual angel to guard and protect us, and to deliver us from the snares of evil demons. Archangels are entrusted with the tasks of guarding nations, as the Blessed Moses taught, and with those remarks the Blessed Daniel is in accord; for he himself speaks of 'the chief of the Kingdom of the Persians,' and a little later of 'the chief of the Greeks,' while he calls Michael 'the chief of Israel.'" The Church Fathers would also posit that St. Michael stood guard at the gate of paradise after Adam and Eve had been banished, and he was the angel through whom God published the Ten Commandments, who blocked the passage of Balaam (Nm 22:20), and who destroyed the army of Sennacherib (2 Chr 32:21).

St. Basil and other Greek Fathers ranked St. Michael as the Prince of all the Angels. With the rise of scholasticism and the exposition of the "nine choirs of angels," some said St. Michael was the prince of the Seraphim, the first of the choirs. (However, St. Thomas Aquinas assigned St. Michael as the prince of the last choir, the angels.)

St. Michael the Archangel has been invoked for protection on various occasions. A great plague struck Rome in 590. Pope St. Gregory the Great led a procession through the streets as an act of penance, seeking the forgiveness of and atoning for sin. At the tomb of Hadrian (now Castle Sant'Angelo near St. Peter's Basilica), St. Michael appeared and sheathed his sword, indicating the end of the plague. The Holy Father later built a chapel at the top of the tomb and to this day a large statue of St. Michael rests there.

In our Catholic tradition, St. Michael has four duties: to continue to wage battle against Satan and the other fallen angels; to save the souls of the faithful from the power of Satan especially at the hour of death; to protect the People of God, both the Jews of the Old Covenant and the Christians of the New Covenant; and finally to lead the souls of the departed from this life and present them to Our Lord for the particular judgment, and at the end of time for the final judgment. For these reasons, Christian iconography depicts St. Michael as a knight-warrior, wearing battle armor and wielding a sword or spear, while standing triumphantly on a serpent or other representation of Satan. Sometimes he is depicted holding the scales of justice or the book of life, both symbols of the last judgment.

As Catholics, we have remembered through our liturgical rites the important role of St. Michael in defending us against Satan and the powers of evil.

For the greater part of this century, the faithful recited the prayer to St. Michael at the end of the Mass. Pope Leo XIII (d. 1903) had a prophetic vision of the coming century of sorrow and war. After celebrating Mass, the Holy Father was conferring with his cardinals. Suddenly, he fell to the floor. The cardinals immediately called for a doctor. No pulse was detected, and the Holy Father was feared dead. Just as suddenly, Pope Leo awoke and said, "What a horrible picture I was permitted to see!" In this vision, God gave Satan the choice of one century in which to do his worst work against the Church. The devil chose the 20th century.

So moved was the Holy Father from this vision that he composed the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel: "St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle! Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into Hell, Satan, and all the other evil spirits who roam about the world seeking the ruin of souls." Pope Leo ordered this prayer said at the conclusion of Mass in 1886. (When Pope Paul VI issued the *Novus Ordo* of the Mass in 1968, the prayer to St. Michael and the reading of the "last gospel" at the end of the Mass were suppressed.)

St. Michael figures prominently in the Rite of Exorcism, particularly in the case of diabolical infestation of places. Here the priest prays: "Most glorious Prince of the Heavenly Army, Holy Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle against the princes and powers and rulers of darkness in this world, against the spiritual iniquities of those former angels. Come to the help of man whom God made in his own image and whom he bought from the tyranny of Satan at a great price. The Church venerates you as her custodian and patron. The Lord confided to your care all the souls of those redeemed, so that you would lead them to happiness in Heaven. Pray to the God of peace that he crush Satan under our feet; so that Satan no longer be able to hold men captive and thus injure the Church. Offer our prayers to the Most High God, so that His mercies be given us soon. Make captive that Animal, that Ancient Serpent, which is enemy and Evil

Spirit, and reduce it to everlasting nothingness, so that it no longer seduce the nations."

In the Spring of 1994, our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, urged the faithful to offer the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel. He also made the strong suggestion that the recitation of the prayer be instituted at Mass once again. (Note that the Holy Father did not mandate the recitation of the prayer at Mass.) Clearly, the Holy Father was responding to the grave evils we see present in our world — the sins of abortion, euthanasia, pornography, fornication, child abuse, terrorism, genocide and the like. Without question, Satan and the other fallen angels are doing their best to lead souls to Hell. We need the help of St. Michael.

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# Choirs of Angels

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By Fr. William P. Saunders  
Herald Columnist  
(From the issue of 9/26/02)

***With all of the talk about angels, the multitude of pictures and books about them, and even the television shows with angels, why don't we ever hear more about them? Some of these shows make angels seem like fantasy spirits. Too many people have a superficial view of angels. -- A reader in Alexandria***

The *Catechism* clearly affirms, "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" (#328). Given that we do believe in angels, we define them as pure spirits and personal beings with intelligence and free will. They are immortal beings. As the Bible attests, they appear to humans as apparitions with a human form.

Since the 4th century, nine choirs or types of angels are identified in the Bible and have been elaborated upon by various theologians: The first three choirs see and adore God directly. The *seraphim*, which means "the burning ones," have the most intense "flaming" love for God and comprehend Him with the greatest clarity. (Interestingly, Lucifer, which means "light bearer," was one of the seraphim whose beautiful light was changed into darkness.) The *cherubim*, which means "fullness of wisdom," contemplate God's divine providence and plan for His creatures. Lastly, the *thrones*, symbolizing divine justice and judicial power, contemplate God's power and justice.

The next three choirs fulfill God's providential plan for the universe: The *dominations* or *dominions*, whose name evokes authority, govern the lesser choirs of angels. The *virtues*, whose name originally suggested power or strength, implement the orders from the dominations and govern the heavenly bodies. Lastly, the *powers* confront and fight against any evil forces opposed to God's providential plan.

The last three choirs are directly involved in human affairs: The *principalities* care for earthly principalities, such as nations or cities. The *archangels* deliver God's most important messages to mankind, while each *angel* serves as a guardian for each of us. Although not official dogma, this schema became popular in the

Middle Ages in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Hildegard of Bingen, and John Scotus Erigena.

Nevertheless, we believe that Almighty God created the angels before the rest of creation. At some point, some angels, led by Lucifer, rebelled against God. These angels made a free choice, radically and irrevocably rejecting God and His rule. Therefore, they were cast into Hell. This event is mentioned, albeit briefly, in several passages of the New Testament: St. Peter wrote, "Did God spare even the angels who sinned? He did not! He held them captive in Tartarus [Hell] -- consigned them to pits of darkness, to be guarded until judgment" (1 Peter 2:3). In the Letter of St. Jude we read, "There were angels, too, who did not keep to their own domain, who deserted their dwelling place. These the Lord has kept in perpetual bondage, shrouded in murky darkness against the judgment of the great day. Sodom, Gomorrah, and the towns thereabouts indulged in lust, just as those angels did; they practiced unnatural vice. They are set before us to dissuade us, as they undergo a punishment of eternal fire." (Jude 6-7). When Jesus spoke of the Last Judgment and the need to serve the least of our brethren, He said to the unrighteous, "Out of my sight, you condemned, into that everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Always remember that these fallen angels-- the devil and demons-- had been created good, but by their own free will chose to sin and turn away from God.

A key to understanding angels is by looking at what they do. First, angels see, praise, and worship God in His divine presence. Jesus said, "See that you never despise one of these little ones. I assure you, their angels in Heaven constantly behold my heavenly Father's face" (Matthew 18:10), a passage which also indicates that each of us has a guardian angel. The Book of Revelation described how the angels surround the throne of God and sing praises (cf. Revelation 5:11ff, 7:11ff). Moreover, they rejoice over the saved soul of the repentant sinner (Luke 15:10).

Second, *angel* comes from the Greek *angelos* which means "messenger," which describes their role in interacting with this world. St. Augustine stated that angels were "the mighty ones who do His word, hearkening to the voice of His word." Throughout Sacred Scripture, the angels served as messengers of God, whether delivering an actual message of God's plan of salvation, rendering justice, or providing strength and comfort. Here are a few examples of their role as messengers in the Old Testament: After the Fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion, the cherubim guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). Angels protected Lot and his family in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). The angel stopped Abraham as he was about to offer Isaac in sacrifice (Genesis 22). An angel guarded the people on the way to the Promised Land (Exodus 23:20). In the New Testament, an angel appeared to the centurion Cornelius and prompted his conversion (Acts 10:1ff); and an angel freed St. Peter from prison (Acts 12:1ff). In all, Hebrews 1:14 captured their role well: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to serve those who are to inherit salvation?"

## Choirs of Angels, Part II

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By Fr. William P. Saunders  
Herald Columnist  
(From the issue of 10/3/02)

***Last week, Father Saunders began a discussion of angels, examining their role in sacred Scripture and investigating the nine choirs of angels. This week, he discusses the archangels and the guardian angels.***

Sacred Scripture identifies by name three angels, who are the great messengers of God — Sts. Michael, Raphael and Gabriel. They are called "archangels" because of their important roles in God's plan. St. Michael, whose name means, "one who is like God," led the army of angels who cast Satan and the rebellious angels into Hell; at the end of time, he will wield the sword of justice to separate the righteous from the evil (cf. Rev 12:7-0). St. Gabriel, whose name means "strength of God," announced to Mary that she had been chosen as the Mother of the Savior (cf. Lk 1:26-38). St. Raphael, whose name means "remedy of God," cured the blind man Tobit (cf. Tb 5).

The angels are also our guardians. The *Catechism* states, "From infancy to death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession" (no. 336). St. Basil (d. 379) asserted, "Beside each believer stands an angel protector and shepherd leading him to life" (*Adversus Eunomium*, III, 1). Most of us at an early age learned the little prayer to our guardian angel: "Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here. Ever this day be at my side, to light, to guard, to rule, and to guide."

Moreover, as Catholics, we remember the important role of St. Michael in defending us against Satan and the powers of evil. Toward the end of the 19th century, Pope Leo XIII (d. 1903) had a prophetic vision of the coming century of sorrow and war. In this vision, God gave Satan the choice of one century in which to do his worst work. The devil chose the twentieth century. So moved was the Holy Father from this vision that he composed the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel: "St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle! Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust into Hell Satan and all the other evil spirits who roam about the world seeking the ruin of souls." For many years, this prayer was recited at the end of Mass. In 1994, our Holy Father at one of his Wednesday audiences made the strong suggestion that the recitation of the prayer be instituted at Mass once again given the great evils we see present in our world — the sins of abortion, euthanasia, terrorism, genocide and the like.

As members of the Church, we are conscious of the angels in our liturgical practices. At Mass, in the Preface before the Eucharistic Prayer, we join with all of the angels and saints to sing the hymn of praise, "Holy, holy, holy." In the Eucharistic Prayer I, the priest prays, "Almighty God, we pray that your angel may take this sacrifice to your altar in Heaven." In the Final Commendation of the Funeral Liturgy, the priest prays, "May the angels lead you into paradise; may the martyrs come to welcome you and take you to the holy city, the new and eternal Jerusalem." Moreover, we celebrate in our liturgical calendar the Feasts of the Archangels (Sept. 29) and the Guardian Angels (Oct. 2).

In our daily prayers and activities, we should be mindful of these servants of God who by His love keep our lives safe from harm and guide us on the path of salvation.

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## Some Catholic Scientists

As a practical demonstration that there is no contradiction between Divine Revelation and Science, we here list some of the thousands of scientists who through the ages have been practising members of the Catholic Church and at the same time outstanding in Science. These men not only found no conflict between science and religion, but became more firm in their faith as they delved deeper into science. As Marconi, one of the greatest scientists of our time, declared: "Science alone is unable to explain many things, and most of all, the greatest of mysteries -- the mystery of our existence. I believe, not only as a Catholic, but also as scientist." We do not include here the names of Catholics preeminent in navigation, architecture, art, music or literature, limiting ourselves to natural and physical science.

<b>Algue</b> , a priest, invented the barocyclonometer, to detect approach of cyclones.	<b>Ampere</b> was founder of the science of electrodynamics, and investigator of the laws of electro-magnetism.
<b>Becquerel</b> , Antoine Cesar, was the founder of electro-chemistry.	<b>Becquerel</b> , Antoine Henri, was the discoverer of radio-activity.
<b>Binet</b> , mathematician and astronomer, set forth the principle, "Binet's Theorem."	<b>Braille</b> invented the Braille system for the blind.
<b>Buffon</b> wrote the first work on natural history.	<b>Carrell</b> , Nobel prize winner in medicine and physiology, is renowned for his work in surgical technique.
<b>Caesalpinus</b> , a Papal physician, was the first to construct a system of botany.	<b>Cassiodorus</b> , a priest, invented the watch.
<b>Columbo</b> discovered the pulmonary circulation of the blood.	<b>Copernicus</b> , a priest, expounded the Copernican system.
<b>Coulomb</b> established the fundamental laws of static electricity.	<b>De Chauliac</b> , a Papal physician, was the father of modern surgery and hospitals.
<b>De Vico</b> , a priest, discovered six	<b>Descartes</b> founded analytical

comets.	geometry.
<b>Dumas</b> invented a method of ascertaining vapor densities.	<b>Endlicher</b> , botanist and historian, established a new system of classifying plants.
<b>Eustachius</b> , for whom the Eustachian tube was named, was one of the founders of modern anatomy.	<b>Fabricius</b> discovered the valvular system of the veins.
<b>Fallopian</b> , for whom the Fallopian tube was named, was an eminent physiologist.	<b>Fizeau</b> was the first to determine experimentally the velocity of light.
<b>Foucault</b> invented the first practical electric arc lamp; he refuted the corpuscular theory of light; he invented the gyroscope.	<b>Fraunhofer</b> was initiator of spectrum analysis; he established laws of diffraction.
<b>Fresnel</b> contributed more to the science of optics than any other man.	<b>Galilei</b> , a great astronomer, is the father of experimental science.
<b>Galvani</b> , one of the pioneers of electricity, was also an anatomist and physiologist.	<b>Gioja</b> , father of scientific navigation, invented the mariner's compass.
<b>Gramme</b> invented the Gramme dynamo.	<b>Gutenberg</b> invented printing.
<b>Herzog</b> discovered a cure for infantile paralysis.	<b>Holland</b> invented the first practical sub marine.
<b>Kircher</b> , a priest, made the first definite statement of the germ theory of disease.	<b>Laennec</b> invented the stethoscope.
<b>Lancist</b> , a Papal physician, was the father of clinical medicine.	<b>Latreille</b> was pioneer in entomology.
<b>Lavoisier</b> is called Father of Modern Chemistry.	<b>Leverrier</b> discovered the planet Neptune.
<b>Lully</b> is said to have been the first to employ chemical symbols.	<b>Malpighi</b> , a Papal physician, was a botanist, and the father of comparative physiology.
<b>Marconi's</b> place in radio is	<b>Mariotte</b> discovered Mariotte's law

unsurpassed.	of gases.
<b>Mendel</b> , a monk, first established the laws of heredity, which gave the final blow to the theory of natural selection.	<b>Morgagni</b> , founder of modern pathology; made important studies in aneurisms.
<b>Muller</b> was the greatest biologist of the 19th century, founder of modern physiology.	<b>Pashcal</b> demonstrated practically that a column of air has weight.
<b>Pasteur</b> , called the "Father of Bacteriology," and inventor of bio-therapeutics, was the leading scientist of the 19th century.	