

# THE ANGELS OF GOD

## Texts from the

### *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

#### THE EXISTENCE OF ANGELS – A TRUTH OF THE FAITH

The profession of faith of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215 AD) affirms that God ‘from the beginning of time made at once out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal, that is, the angelic and the earthly, and then the human creature, who as it were shares in both orders, being composed of spirit and body’. (327)

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)

#### **Who are the angels?**

St Augustine says: ‘ “Angel” is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is “spirit”; if you seek the name of their office, it is “angel”: from what they are, “spirit”, from what they do, “angel”.’

With their whole beings the angels are *servants* and messengers of God. Because they ‘always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven’ they are the ‘mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word’. (Mt 18:10; Ps 103:20) (329)

As purely *spiritual* creatures angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendour of their glory bears witness. (330)

#### **The angels in God’s plan**

Angels have been present since creation and throughout the history of salvation, announcing this salvation from afar or near and serving the accomplishment of the divine plan: The angels closed the earthly paradise; protected Lot; saved Hagar and her child; stayed Abraham’s hand; communicated the law by their ministry; led the People of God; announced births and callings; and assisted the prophets, just to cite a few examples. Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Precursor and that of Jesus himself. (332)

#### **Christ ‘with all his angels’ - the centre of the angelic world**

Christ is the centre of the angelic world. They are *his* angels: ‘When the Son of Man comes in all his glory, and all the angels with him...’ (Mt 25:31)

The angels belong to Christ because they were created *through* him and *for* him: ‘for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him’. (Col 1:16)

They belong to him still more because he has made them messengers of his saving plan: ‘Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?’ (Heb 1:14) (331)

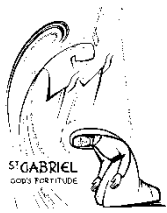


#### **Jesus is surrounded by the adoration and service of the angels**

From the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of the Word incarnate is surrounded by the adoration and service of the angels. When God ‘brings the firstborn into the world, he says: “Let all God’s angels worship him.”’ (Heb 1:6)

The angels’ song of praise at the birth of Christ has not ceased resounding in the Church’s praise: ‘Glory to God in the highest!’ They protect Jesus in his infancy, serve him in the desert, strengthen him in his agony in the garden, when he could have been saved by them from the hands of his enemies as Israel had been.

Again, it is the angels who ‘evangelise’ by proclaiming the Good News of Christ’s Incarnation and Resurrection. They will be present at Christ’s return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgement. (333)



#### **The angels in the life of the Church and in the liturgy**

The whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of the angels. (334)

In her liturgy, the Church joins with the angels to adore the thrice-holy God. She invokes their assistance in Eucharistic Prayer I: ‘Almighty God, we pray that your angel...’; in the funeral liturgy: ‘May the angels lead you into Paradise...’.

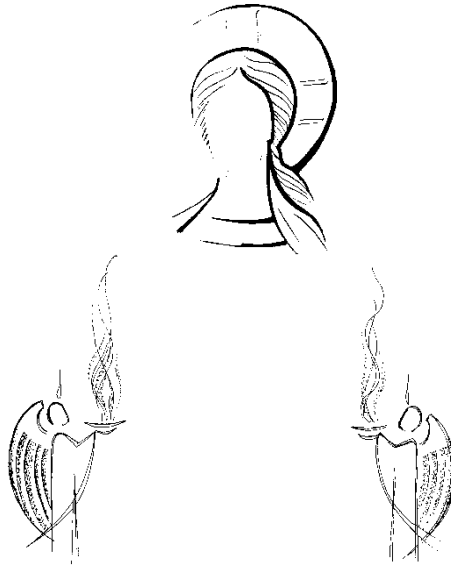
In the ‘Cherubic Hymn’ of the Byzantine Liturgy, she celebrates the memory of certain angels more particularly - St Michael, St Gabriel, St Raphael and the guardian angels. (335)

#### **The guardian angels**

From its beginning until death human life is surrounded by the angels’ watchful care and intercession. St Basil says: ‘Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life’. Already here on earth the Christian shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God. (336)

## IN BRIEF

- Angels are spiritual creatures who glorify God without ceasing and who serve his saving plans for other creatures: ‘the angels work together for the benefit of us all’ (St Thomas Aquinas)
- The angels surround Christ their Lord. They serve him especially in the accomplishment of his saving mission to men.
- The Church venerates the angels who help her on her earthly pilgrimage and protect every human being.



## THE FALL OF THE ANGELS

### *At first a good angel, Satan rejected God and his plan*

Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called “Satan” or the “devil”. The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: “The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing” (Lateran Council IV). (391)

Scripture speaks of a *sin* of these angels. This “fall” consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably *rejected* God and his reign. We find a reflection of that rebellion in the tempter's words to our first parents: “You will be like God” (Gen 3:5). The devil “has sinned from the beginning”; he is “a liar and the father of lies” (I Jn 3:8; Jn 8:44). (392)

### *The disastrous influence of the devil*

It is the *irrevocable* character of their choice, and not a defect in the infinite divine mercy, that makes the angels' sin unforgivable. “There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death” (St John Damascene). (393)

Scripture witnesses to the disastrous influence of the one Jesus calls “a murderer from the beginning”(Jn 8:44), who would even try to divert Jesus from the mission received from his Father. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (I Jn 3:8). In its consequences the gravest of these works was the mendacious seduction that led man to disobey God. (394)

### *The limitations of Satan's power*

The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God's reign. Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and although his action may cause grave injuries - of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature - to each man and to society, the action is permitted by divine providence which with strength and gentleness guides human and cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but “we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him” (Rom 8:28). (395)

## IN BRIEF

- Satan or the devil and the other demons are fallen angels who have freely refused to serve God and his plan. Their choice against God is definitive. They try to associate man in their revolt against God. (414)
- Christians believe that “the world has been established and kept in being by the Creator's love; has fallen into slavery to sin but has been set free by Christ, crucified and risen to break the power of [Satan] the evil one...” (421)
- In the last petition [of the Lord's Prayer], “but deliver us from evil”, Christians pray to God with the Church to show forth the victory, already won by Christ, over the “ruler of this world”, Satan, the angel personally opposed to God and to his plan of salvation. (2864)

