

INSTRUMENTS OF GOD: FEAST OF THE HOLY ARCHANGELS

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In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

September 29, as I'm sure you're aware, is the feast of the three archangels: St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael. And it's an important feast in the calendar of the Church because it helps us, it's an occasion for us to identify the roles- the role of the angels have in our life, and how they can help us by their example, of course. But, well, what is the role of an angel? These are not saints like human beings that have lived a certain life. These are creatures created by God for a very specific purpose. Now, when were the angels created, exactly, like when do they come into the picture?

Well, we can begin by reading from the Book of Genesis and read the creation account that was interpreted in a very unique way by St. Augustine because when you read the very, very first chapter of Genesis where you read the creation account, the very first chapter, it says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth. The Earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." So, that spirit of God was generally seen as the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God - the third person of the Blessed Trinity - but then it says, literally the third verse, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day and the darkness he called night. And then there was evening and then there was morning. One day."

Then it goes on to talk about the rest of creation, the waters and then the waters under the heavens. And then God said, Let there be the firmament of heaven and the day and the night and then- and then let there be- bring forth living creatures, according to all kinds of the Earth, the creeping things, and beasts of the earth, and so forth - the vegetation, the birds, the fish, and then of course, at the very end we get humans. But, where are the angels in all of this? It doesn't say God created the angels. It doesn't say that, they're not mentioned. So, where are the angels?

And yet, later on, the serpent that tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, well he was a fallen angel. I mean, he's described as a serpent, but he was really- he was really the devil. So, this is what St. Augustine says, he interprets this, he says that- that the angels were actually created on the very first day. They were the highest form of creation, that is, of God's creatures, because it says that God said, "Let there be light" and there was light and God saw that the light was good. And he separated light from darkness. He said,

well, this is what St. Augustine said, so how is it possible that he said that there was light and yet he had not created the sun? Because the sun comes like after- this doesn't make any sense having- you have light and you haven't created the sun yet, this is, well- he read that "Let there be light" in an allegorical sense to suggest that, well, that light is maybe, well, those are the angels. And he says he separated the light from the darkness on the first day and that separation of light and dark is really the separation of the good angels from the bad angels.

And because, at first, all angels were good - they were all good. And- but there was a big battle and well, we are told, a third of the angels led by Lucifer who desired to be like God, and- well, they rebelled. And a lower angel to Lucifer said, "Who can be like God?" Lucifer wanted to be like God in his pride, but this slightly lower angel said, "But who can be like God?" And that, well, that was St. Michael the Archangel. That's the famous phrase he said, "Who can be like God?" And that's- that's the title to St. Michael, or the meaning of St. Michael, *quis sicut deus*, who can be like God? And it was this tremendous battle, and a third of the angels created by God were thrown into hell and St. John tells us in his Book of Revelation of this terrible battle, it wasn't- it wasn't like a physical battle, like a battle of Normandy where bullets were flying, where there was gunfire and tanks. It was truly a battle between good and evil. And that's what, well, we go here from the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis then we go all the way to the very last book in the Book of Revelation where we read, "Now war arose in Heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in Heaven."

It was a big battle, and we are told basically that the devil lost his place in Heaven. It wasn't a physical place. It was as though he had some kind of throne there or something like that, some kind of luxurious palace or some kind of, you know, major condo with gold bathtubs or something like that. He just lost his place in Heaven. He lost his right. That place was a kind of egotistical drive for authority, for power, to be like God. He did not want to obey; he did not want to play his secondary role there. He did not want to be in the service of God and to do his will.

And so, Augustine goes on to say that the angels are meant to be there in Heaven. And he talks about the beauty of creation when God created the heavens and the Earth. But these body-less creatures, or these spiritual creatures, they are infinitely more beautiful than all the beauties of creation itself because they were created first and they, in all their beauty which we can't really imagine because they don't have, like, say a physical beauty. So, this is what St. Gregory says, St. Gregory the Great. He says, a famous quote- he said, "You should be aware that the word *angel* denotes a function rather a nature. Those Holy Spirits of Heaven have indeed always been spirits. They can only be called angels when they deliver some message. Moreover, those who deliver a message of lesser importance are called *angels* and those who proclaim a message of supreme importance are call *archangels*."

So, it was that not merely an *angel*, but an *archangel* Gabriel was sent to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was only fitting that the highest angel should come to announce the greatest of all the- of all the messages, so Gabriel was an archangel. And that's why the panorama of creation must be far more breathtaking than

we can ever guess in our own little corner of the cosmos when we consider the angels, when we consider that higher order that God created under him, and the doctrine of angels tells us that human beings live in a universe created by God that- that well, is created by God but far more wondrous a creation than we know and it includes the angels and the archangels, the guardian angels. In other words, if we really saw the creation as it really is, it would include those spiritual creatures- creatures which are the archangels and angels.

Are you aware that there are angels around the Blessed Sacrament right now, and they are beautiful. They are wondrous. They are adoring the Blessed Sacrament just like those angels right there, see, right there. That's meant to mimic and those are like- just like one out of ten of the beauty of the real angels or even one half of, you know, it's like they're very- they're not- you know, the real angels are extremely beautiful, but they're invisible, we can't see them. There are always angels around us - small ones, hybrid angels. Sometimes they're coming in to tell you something, to push you out of the way of danger. It happens that sometimes we invoke the guardian angels of the people that we talked to. It's a habit that St. Josemaria used to have. He'd talk to the guardian angel or invoke the guardian angel of the person he was talking to. And so, then that guardian angel comes to nudge the person that we're listening to that- we're having a conversation with so that that person can be maybe more open, not to kind of block the bandwidth with their own filters, with their own DNS filtering. And, so they can be without those parental controls and not- not really receive the grace- the grace of God.

And so, the guardian angel is there to remove the filter so they can suddenly be removed from their comfort zone, suddenly come out of their- their fear and their anxiety, because if you know that you're accompanied by the angel, especially a guardian angel, well, you come out of you- your comfort zone, because if you stay there, you won't really grow. Suddenly, they will be no longer afraid to launch out into the deep and- and breakout. That's why we should have daring when we speak to friends, maybe with people who have very different ideas, maybe hostile ideas to the Christian faith, be daring in your conversations, and every time you speak with somebody, yes, you want to invoke the Holy Spirit but also their guardian angel, it's- it's like an ally. It'll make you more audacious and also more generous in giving of yourselves.

So, when we greet someone, or when we invoke the guardian angel of our friends, for some people, when they greet the guardian angel of their spouse, it's like we're giving our friend a VPN connection so that they get a clear message unfiltered by anger, by prejudices, by resentment. They say that the Chinese government knows who in China uses a VPN. They know perfectly well who uses it, those people who go to Google and, which is not allowed in China, they're trying to control everything. So, they monitor that person who's using VPN. They monitor them even more because they know that they could be potentially disruptors or because they will not necessarily follow the party line because they monitor them.

But with our angels we're protected in some way. Guardian angels are good, but archangels, well, they have an even more transcendental role in our life, that's why we will celebrate them tomorrow. They have, as is the role of angels, they have a very serious message to transmit to us, just as- just as Gabriel had that

serious message to transmit to the Blessed Mother - that was the message about the Incarnation. What- what could be more important than that? And there are archangels that can change our lives if we listen to their message. They can give us both information, but especially the joyous news that can make us or lead us or invite us to change the very direction of our lives. That is information, news, that- that has to do with the very purpose of our lives.

Now, as you probably know, in Opus Dei we have a devotion to the archangels, to Michael, to Gabriel, and to Raphael. And this stems back to a retreat that St. Josemaria did back in 1932 when he was in Segovia. He went into a little chapel there, the Chapel of San Juan de la Cruz or St. John of the Cross, a very old chapel - I've never been there myself. But there he, for the first time, invoked the three guardian angels for the different kinds of apostolates that there are in Opus Dei. And, well, he was doing a retreat, so he really felt that the angels were there with him as he prayed. And he understood that there would be like three different people in Opus Dei or involved in the apostolates of Opus Dei. There would be the numeraries - he's right, those who have been to live Apostolic celibacy, right, no- no vows, no promises, in that sense no religious vows, but yes, an availability to be in the middle of the world and well, to renounce to marriage, so that they could be more available for the apostolate. And those- those numeraries he entrusted St. Michael the Archangel.

Now, St. Michael, well, he's always the champion of courage, of protection. He's always shown with this amazing armor, he's champion of integrity, of strength, of truth. And well, St. Michael was sent so he can help us overcome any fear that we might have, any fear - he's like a soldier. He's like a well-armed soldier, so we'll never be paralyzed by anything that might be unknown or not clear to us. He helps us really be- I would say that - he helps us to be fighters, soldiers, in a war of peace against- against the danger of just living for ourselves. It could happen that we just say, you know, I'm gonna live for myself, living in a kind of comfortable mediocrity, living with minimal demands and a sanctity- a type of sanctity that is not really mature - there St. Michael comes in and he pulls out his sword, he unsheathes it; he's not afraid.

Like- like the soldiers in *Saving Private Ryan*, the famous movie that are in those ramp-fronted Higgins boats. I don't know if you've ever heard of the Higgins boats, these boat that were invented- these kind of amphibious boats that were used in Normandy in 1944 on D-Day, and they could withstand serious gunfire and explosions. But then, when they arrived at the beach, this front end of the boat just would come down and the soldiers would run out onto the beaches. And they were designed by this guy called Higgins, Andrew Jackson Higgins. He was from Nebraska and- and he had to, in secret, produce a massive amount of these Higgins boats because, in many ways, the war depended on the efficaciousness of those- of those boats which would only be used once, just once, just to disembark the troops and that's it. They would never be used again because the front end is going to collapse and allow them to go out, but he had to produce - I don't know how many - but he had to produce tons of them. And he had this massive warehouse, or rather assembly line, where everybody had to work, like, literally twenty-four hours before D-Day. And I remember seeing the photo with a big sign that said, *He who relaxes helps the Axis*. You can't relax because then you're going to help the Axis- of the- obviously, the Germans, the enemy.

And that was what St. Michael does and that's what he is, he's a fighter who will not relax. And we always have to be ready to fight in our ascetical struggle. In that sense, we have recourse to St. Michael because he's quite fearless, he's not cuddled, he fights the devil. In paintings of him fighting the devil, sometimes he's squashing him under his feet, and the devil is there rioting, being destroyed by Michael.

In one Center where I was, we had a beautiful statue of St. Michael who is like- it looked really- very realistic, but he looks very calm, cool, blonde hair, wings, and below him is this creepy looking creature, kind of, well, looks like the dragon and that's the devil. And somebody donated his wisdom teeth, and they put his wisdom teeth in the teeth of the dragon. So, in the statue, right, so it's a real built wisdom teeth, and it looks real, and sometimes we bring little kids there and we have them touch the teeth of the dragon. But, of course, the children are not afraid because they got Michael there, he's got the sword on the- on the- and so...

And it's important to remember, you know, that people really do count on us to be courageous, to be brave, just as they count on soldiers to protect them from enemies. We don't protect them from physical onslaught, but yes, from the onslaught of meaninglessness, from the onslaught of laziness of the afternoon nap, of two hours in the afternoon spent on Facebook and YouTube, from not giving my best. So, like good soldiers, you and I can't be pampered. Soldiers in battle, they often eat tasteless rations, just basic foods that have been sealed in airtight packages for years, but they eat them and they're ready to go. A friend of mine who works in the Army, he told me recently, he said, 'Yeah, I just had my- I was on a training exercise and they gave me my package for lunch and it was dated 1984. So, as I guess- I guess a sealed package that just lasts forever. Of course, it doesn't taste great, but it's protein, that's all I needed at that moment.' Soldiers can't be overly dainty or picky eaters. And you can say that that's- that what St. Michael will protect us from because he's a fighter and he's courageous.

Then there's of course St. Gabriel - St. Josemaria entrusted him with the work with married people - they too, of course, need an angel, and not just an angel, they need an archangel. And well, there St. Gabriel means *God's strength* - *God's strength*. And he is mentioned several times in the Bible, especially that famous line in Zachariah at the conception- or- or the priest Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, when he appears to Zachariah, he said, "I am Gabriel who stands before God," because Zachariah kind of doubted. He said, "I am Gabriel." It must have been quite frightening. Gabriel also appeared in a dream to St. Joseph, and the tradition says that it was St. Gabriel that came to Our Lord and comforted him in his agony in the garden.

And I think it was St. Gabriel also, I mean, I'm not sure of this, but I suspect it is that- that it- he is the angel that appeared in Fatima, to the three children because Lucia before- before they even had the vision of the Blessed Mother, Lucia recounts that the vision that they had of this angel that appeared to them. And this angel appeared to them kind of to prepare the way for the coming of the Blessed Mother, and it was like the vision that took place in the Cova da Iria in 1916. And she- Lucia describes this figure as "having the appearance of a young man of 14 or 15, whiter than snow, she says, which the sun rendered transparent as if it were of crystal and of great beauty. We were surprised and half absorbed. We did not

say a word. While coming closer to us, the angel said, 'Do not fear, I am the angel of peace, pray with me. Pray with me.' And kneeling on the Earth, he bent his forehead to the ground. Prompted by a supernatural movement we imitated him and repeated the words which we heard him pronounce, 'My God, I believe in thee, I adore thee, I hope in thee, I love thee. I ask pardon for all those who do not believe in thee, do not adore thee, do not hope in thee, and do not love thee.' Having repeated that prayer three times, he got up again and said to us, 'Pray. In this way, the hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications.' And then he disappeared." Well, I think that was Gabriel. Sorry, but I think that was Gabriel. Well, it didn't say, you know, there was no town in the name tag saying, *Hi, I'm Gabriel*, but, you know, like in Walmarts or whatever, but- well, if someone has a suggestion, let them suggest another name.

So we got Michael, we have Gabriel, and then we have Raphael. Well, St. Josemaria entrusted the apostolate of young people to St. Raphael. He was- he appears in the Book of Tobias, or Tobit, rather: *I am the angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the Lord*. And his name means *God has healed*. And of course, he came in there and healed the blindness of Tobias and- or Tobias, in the Book of Tobit, and he's called *healing*, or it's called *the medicine of God* just by touching the eyes. And, well, he's only mentioned there, that's it, that's the only place, what can you do?

But, what does that mean? What does that mean, this healing- he is the healing power of God? Well, it means, I think that, when we are invoking St. Raphael the Archangel, that our words can have a healing power if we invoke him. We can help others be healed from anxiety, from worry; healed also from selfishness or just blindness, as Tobias was- was healed from blindness, but not necessarily physical blindness, just healed from- from not seeing what God wants. It's a healing of the soul, it's a healing in the soul. We are healed in confession, but we also are healed in spiritual direction when we open up our hearts, when we open our wounds, when we open up and talk about our- our deepest wounds, our defects, and let them be cleaned by this suave medicine, this clear ointment, the pus comes out and we are healed. That's- that's the role of the Archangel Gabriel.

Sometimes in a wound you have to pour in disinfectant, like Mercurochrome - we used to put that stuff- I don't know if you can still find that, you know, like kind of like peroxide, but it was red and it just made your wound super red, but it killed it - well, it disinfected it. And in spiritual direction, we have to show our wounds so they can be disinfected - your ills, what bothers you.

All this to say that the archangels motivate us to live for others in a true contest of meaning and purpose. No matter where we are, we always see the angels are there in our life, but we can't see them, but they are there and they help us to live with hope. They help us to live with purpose. They help us to live with courage. So, I invite you tonight- tonight, or this evening at some point, okay, which angel are you going to invoke, which archangel? You've got- also got the guardian angel, they're- they're saying, *Hello! What about me here, you know? I'm, you know, I'm here too*. So, when your undertaking something dangerous, he can help you too. If you were to see your guardian angel, he doesn't look like a dainty little child, he probably looks like a war-torn soldier with scars and all kinds of black eye everywhere, you know, like

what happened with Fulton Sheen. He woke up from his prayer- he was doing his prayer but fell asleep. He saw a guy completely like bruised in the face, bruised in the shoulders, black eye here and there, all disheveled looking, and he said, 'Who are you?' He said, 'I'm your guardian angel.' He said, 'Well, you don't look like a guardian angel.' He said, 'Well, yeah, I've been spending all my life protecting you, that's why I look like this, you know, I'm not like a dainty little flowery daisy, you know.'

So, okay, at one point, you'll invoke your guardian angel. Okay, but especially one of those archangels, Michael, Gabriel, or Raphael, they will intercede and you can say, press the meaning of life more deeply into your soul, deeply into your heart, and help you also to be an instrument for others. Our Blessed Mother responded to that great archangel Gabriel and it led her to say yes to the will of God and that changed the course of the whole- the whole world. And we have to think in those hopeful ways as well. Our Blessed Mother will intercede for us. St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. Raphael too.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you've communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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