

The Mighty Archangels

BY **KATHLEEN BECKMAN**, 29 SEPTEMBER 2016

The Office of Readings for the feast of the Archangels, St. Michael, St. Gabriel and St. Raphael, offers a reflection by Saint Gregory, pope, "...Those who deliver messages of lesser importance are called angels; and those who proclaim messages of supreme importance are called archangels. Personal names are assigned to some to denote their ministry when they come among us. Thus, Michael means, "Who is like God?"; Gabriel is "The Strength of God"; Raphael is "God's Remedy."

We are beloved of God, and He provides us with angelic companions and protectors as the Catechism states, "The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls "angels" is a truth of the faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition" (328).

The Archangel Michael

Pope Gregory continues, "Whenever some act of wondrous power must be performed, Michael is sent, so that his action and his name may make it clear that no one can do what God does by his superior power. So also our ancient foe desired in his pride to be like God, saying, *I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of heaven; I will be like the Most High.* He will be allowed to remain in power until the end of the world when he will be destroyed in the final punishment."

St. Michael is known to be the warrior angel who fights Satan and his demons from the beginning, and throughout the epic Christian pilgrimage, St. Michael is the great defender of the Church on earth.

I'd like to share an anecdote related to St. Michael. As I was exiting St. Michael's Norbertine Abbey Chapel after Mass, I noted 2 young boys standing in front of a nearby large white marble statue of St. Michael. I also stopped before the same statue to silently pray the St. Michael Prayer. I saw that the younger boy, approximately 5 years old, stood in awe of the impressive St. Michael statue as he inquisitively examined the details of the handsome sculpture. Suddenly he exclaimed to the older boy, approximately 12 years old, "Look, St. Michael is stepping on the head of the devil!" To which the older boy quickly replied, "Yes, that is what St. Michael does and he thrusts his sword into him too!" I thought to myself, "Bravo, St. Michael! Bravo, boys and bravo to your parents who taught you about the role of St. Michael!"

Since childhood, I have had a strong devotion to St. Michael, always perceiving myself under the protective canopy of his God-given power. So devoted am I to St. Michael that our first-born son was named after him and we enthusiastically encouraged him to have real devotion to his patron saint. In my new book I share how St. Michael dramatically helped to defend our family when all odds were stacked against us in a lawsuit by the F.B.I.—who lost their case. Recently when my car was broadsided by an eight-passenger van, I thought of St. Michael as I walked away without injury though my new sedan was totaled.

I often ponder how truly present and effective St. Michael is in the battle against the fallen angels who roam the earth seeking to tempt, vex, oppress or possess God's children. During each official rite of exorcism that I have witnessed, the priest and team ardently summon the help of St. Michael throughout the ministry. St. Michael never fails to support the priest in his ministry of proclaiming Christ's victory over evil. Victims attest that the evil spirits greatly fear St. Michael knowing that God has given him the power not only to expel them, but also to increase their torment. St. Michael is a reflection of God's omnipotent love and His provision for the Church militant in all our struggles.

The Archangel Gabriel

Again, in the Office of Readings, Pope Gregory teaches, "...Gabriel, who is called God's strength, was sent to Mary. He came to announce the One who appeared as a humble man to quell the cosmic powers. Thus, God's strength announced the coming of the Lord of heavenly powers, mighty in battle."

Just prior to the coming of Christ, the Archangel Gabriel is sent to announce to Zachariah the birth of a son, John the Baptist, who would prepare the way of the Lord. "I am Gabriel, who stand before God, and am sent to speak to you, and to bring you these good tidings."

Probably the most joyful message ever given to an angel was the message brought by Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary—the message of the Incarnation.

The Catholic Encyclopedia states:

It is the first time that a prince of the court of heaven greets an earthly child of God, a young woman, with a deference and respect a prince would show to his Queen. That Angel's flight to the earth marked the dawn of a new day, the beginning of a new covenant, and the fulfillment of God's promises to His people. ...Gabriel must overcome Mary's reaction of surprise at both his appearance and especially at his manner of salutation. He has to prepare and dispose her pure virginal mind to the idea of maternity, and obtain her consent to become the mother of the Son of God. Gabriel nobly fulfills this task: "Fear not, Mary, for you have found grace with God." He calls her by her own name in order to inspire confidence and to show affection and solicitude for her perturbation. As a last word of encouragement and, at the same time, a most gratifying information, the Archangel reveals to Mary that her elderly and barren cousin Elizabeth is now an expectant mother in her sixth month of pregnancy. This final argument was offered in order "to prove that nothing can be impossible with God."



Theologians think that Gabriel was probably given special charge of the Holy Family in Nazareth, and was probably the angel who brought good tidings of great joy to the shepherds keeping night watches over their flock on the night that Christ was born, and probably the angel who appeared to Joseph in his sleep to warn him against Herod and guide him to Egypt. Gabriel who is "the strength of God" may have been the angel in Luke's gospel narrative of Christ's agony in Gethsemane, "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him." It seems fitting that the angel, who announced His birth, protected Him in infancy, and strengthened Him in the Garden, should be the first to announce his resurrection on Easter morning.

The Archangel Rafael

Pope Gregory's homily continues, "Raphael means God's remedy, for when he touched Tobit's eyes in order to cure him, he banished the darkness of his blindness. Thus, since he is to heal, he is rightly called God's remedy."

The Catholic Encyclopedia states:

The history of Tobias, father and son, contains the grandest angelophany of the whole Bible, and it all revolves around the manifestation of the Archangel Raphael under the assumed name and form of a beautiful young man named Azarias. At the very end of his long mission the Archangel revealed his own identity and his real name, together with the actual purpose of his mission: "*And now the Lord hath sent me to heal thee, and to deliver Sara thy son's wife from the devil. For I am the angel Raphael, ... who stand before the Lord.*" In this angelophany, Saint Raphael reveals himself as a divine healer not only of physical infirmities, the blindness of old Tobias, but also of spiritual afflictions and diabolical vexations, as in the case of Sara, young Tobias' wife. (Angelophany is a term used to describe the visible manifestation of angels to mankind.)

Raphael seems to have been at work at Jerusalem, in the days of Christ, in the pool called Bethsaida. In the five porticoes surrounding that pool there was a multitude of sick people, waiting for the action of the Angel upon the water of the pool: "An Angel of the Lord used to come down at certain times into the pool and the water was moved. And he that went down first into the pool after the motion of the water, was cured of whatever infirmity he had."

Archangel Raphael's healing ministry may still be seen in the miraculous cures that have taken place up to our own times in many of the sacred shrines throughout the Christian world.

Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, mighty Archangels, graciously protect, guide and heal us on our journey to the Father's house. Amen.

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