

# OCTOBER 8, 2023: 27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



This past week we celebrated the Feast of the Guardian Angels. The guardian angels are a fascinating topic to me. I have had a lot of questions about them throughout my priesthood. And people have some interesting misconceptions about angels in general, and guardian angels in particular.

The first misconception is in relation to human beings and angels. Many times after a person dies, people will say that we now have an angel in heaven watching over us. They, of course, are referring to the person who has died, but from a Catholic, theological perspective this is simply not true. A human being can never become an angel. Angels are a different order of creation. They are purely spiritual beings with no corporeal (physical/bodily) aspect to them. By nature, human beings are both spiritual and corporeal and, as such, we can never be angels. When people die and hopefully go to heaven, they are, in a sense, incomplete. They are spiritual beings in heaven but they are *not* angels—they are saints; the difference is important. At the resurrection of the dead, on the last day, peoples' souls will be reunited with their bodies. Until that time, they are disembodied human beings in heaven awaiting the consummation of the promises of Christ. Both saints and angels will have their own roles in heaven, but all will be focused on one thing: worshiping God through eternal praise and thanksgiving.

Many people think of angels as having bodies, probably based on cultural depictions of angels in books and movies. We tend to treat angels as though they are supercharged human beings who are just closer to God. We have, of course, pictures of angels in church, particularly Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. For the Church, artwork such as paintings, icons, or sculptures are *not* intended to make us believe that angels have bodies like us. Rather, their purpose is to help us ponder the nature of angels: we need to create a human construct to help us comprehend their existence and their ultimate meaning. Such artwork simply gives us the ability to do so.

It is true that people have encountered angels and seen them in bodily forms but, again, God is simply trying to help us out: a being that is purely spiritual would be difficult for us to recognize as real. God, therefore, allows our mind to construct an image that looks physical but, in reality, is not. This is what allows human beings to interact with the purely spiritual in a way that makes sense in a human context.

Another popular but erroneous activity that people take on is coming up with the “name” of their guardian angel. The truth is that from a Catholic perspective, guardian angels have no names. The purpose of an angel's existence is to be a messenger from God. That is what the word angel means. Their function, in a sense, is in their name. The “names” given to Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael speak to the functions they are called to perform for God. As Pope Saint Gregory the Great wrote, “Some angels are given proper names to denote the service they are empowered to perform. In that holy city, where perfect knowledge flows from the vision of almighty God, those who have no names may easily be known. But personal names are assigned to some, not because they could not be known without them but, rather, to denote their ministry when they came among us. Thus, Michael means ‘Who is like God’; Gabriel is ‘The Strength of God’; and Raphael is ‘God's Remedy.’”

He furthermore tells us, “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. Then, he will fight with Archangel Michael, as we are told by John: *A battle was fought with Michael the Archangel.*

So, too, Gabriel, who is called God's strength, was sent to Mary. He came to announce the One who would appear as a humble man to quell the cosmic powers. Thus, God's strength announced the coming of the Lord of the heavenly powers, mighty in battle.

Raphael means, as I have said, God's remedy, for when he touched Tobit's eyes to cure him, he banished the darkness of his blindness. Thus, since he comes to heal, he is rightly called God's remedy."

The term guardian angel is really the "name" of all the guardian angels; they need no further designation. We need to accept angels for what they are—servants of God. They perform their functions in his name—at times as intermediaries with us, but mostly to worship God— their primary function—and help us do the same.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to call me at (978) 254-0560. If you prefer to email, please visit <https://theholyrood.org/email-fr-brian>.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Fr. Brian