

Out of the Upper Room: Angels Reflection 01



♪ "I believe in angels" ♪ "Angels watchin' over me" ♪
♪ "Fourteen angels watch do keep" ♪
♪ "May songs of the angels welcome you" ♪

I could go on and on. So many songs mention angels, from disco to operas to songs at funerals....our culture loves angels, but what do we know about them?
On Friday, September 29th we celebrate the Feast of the Archangels. Let's start there.

Who are the archangels?

Well, we believe that there are 7 of them– we know the names of 3.

- Michael ("Who is like the Lord?")
- Gabriel ("God is mighty")
- Raphael ("God heals")

We see these three appearing in both the Old and New Testaments. Michael appears in Daniel 12:1 and Revelations 12:7-9, Gabriel also appears in Daniel, Daniel 9 to be specific, to tell about the coming of the Messiah and again in Luke 1 as "this angel of the Lord" to Zechariah and Mary. Raphael is in Tobit 12 and then in John 5. They stand before God and are venerated in both Jewish and Christian tradition.

But there are more than just archangels that Catholic tradition believes, though not as official Church dogma. We accept that there are 9 choirs of angels each given a specific task by God. St. Gregory the Great put these 9 choirs into a single list, St. Thomas Aquinas searched through scripture to find a coherent way to arrange them, and theologian and philosopher Dr. Peter Kreeft wrote a summary of the choirs in his book, Angels and Demons. So what are the choirs?

The first three levels see and adore God directly:

The **seraphim**, the highest choir, comprehend God with maximum clarity, and therefore their love flames the hottest. ("Seraphim" means "the burning ones.") Lucifer ("Light-bearer") was once one of them.

The **cherubim** contemplate God too, but less in himself than in his providence...("Cherubim" means "fullness of wisdom.")

The **thrones** contemplate God's power and judgments. (Thrones symbolize juridical power.)

The next three choirs fulfill God's providential plans for the universe:

The **dominions** ("authority"), command the lesser angels below them.

The **virtues** receive their orders from the dominions and "run" the universe, especially the heavenly bodies. ("Virtue" means power, might, or energy.)

The **powers** serve the virtues by fighting against evil influences that oppose the virtues' providential plan.

The last three choirs directly order human affairs:

The **principalities** care for earthly principalities, that is, cities, nations, and kingdoms.

The **archangels** carry God's important messages to humans.

Ordinary **angels** are the "guardian angels," one for each person. (Did anyone else's mom ever tell them as a child with a bad dream "I'll ask my guardian angel to talk to your guardian angel, now go back to bed"?)

Let's talk about angels and the Mass. Because the Mass is a participation in the heavenly liturgy, we know angels are with us during the Mass.

Msgr. Charles Pope writes on "National Catholic Register" all about what St. John Chrysostom says on this matter:

"the **angels surround the priest, and the whole sanctuary is filled with angels** honoring Christ, present in the Eucharist. [...] The Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer also attests to the presence of many angels. *"And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts ..."* (Common Preface I).

St. John Chrysostom says of the Preface;

"Reflect upon who it is you are near and with whom you are about to invoke God — the Cherubim! Think of the Choirs you are about to enter. Let no one have any thought of earth. Let him lose himself of every earthly thing and transport himself whole and entire into heaven. Let him abide there beside the very throne of glory hovering with the Seraphim and singing the most holy song of the God of glory and majesty."

Angels are all around us, invisible to our human eyes, but around nevertheless, carrying out tasks God has given them. Everyday we should ask the angels to pray for us and thank them for being with us.

*Angel of God, my Guardian dear,
to whom God's love commits me here,
ever this day be at my side,
to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.*

EXPLANATION AND HIERARCHY OF THE 9 CHOIRS OF ANGELS



1ST TRIAD - CONTEMPLATE AND ADORE GOD DIRECTLY

SERAPHIM

ISAIAH 6:1-7

6 WINGS - 2 COVER FEET, 2 COVER FACE, AND 2 FOR FLIGHT

Name means the burning ones, and they are Attendants at the Throne of God. They praise God singing, "Holy Holy Holy is the Lord of Hosts!"



CHERUBIM

EXD 25:18-21, EZK 10:14, REV 4-6

4 FACES AND 4 WINGS - 2 COVER FEET AND 2 FOR FLIGHT

Name means the Fullness of Wisdom, and they Contemplate God's providence. Assigned to protect special places.



THRONES

EZK 10:17, COL 1:16, DAN 7:9

FLAMING, ROTATING RINGS COVERED WITH EYES

Represent the steadfastness of the love of God. They contemplate God's power and judgment, and they appear as the most unlike the others when revealed.



2ND TRIAD - FULFILL GOD'S PLAN IN THE UNIVERSE

DOMINIONS

EPH 1:21, COL 1:16

Lord over the lower choirs and humanity. They take illumination from the higher hierarchies and govern the universe.



VIRTUES

EPH 1:21

Run the operation of movement in the universe. They are often associated with planets, elements, seasons, and nature.



POWERS

EPH 3:10, EPH 6:12

Assist in governing the natural order. They are warrior angels tasked with fighting the war against the demonic choirs.



3RD TRIAD - INTERACT & SERVE HUMANITY CLOSELY

PRINCIPALITIES

EPH 3:10, EPH 1:21

Princes of the lowest triad assigned to care and guard communities, kingdoms, states, and parishes. They are associated with transitions in power.



ARCHANGELS

JUDE 9, 1 THES 4:16, TOB

Leader angels assigned to communicate and carry out God's important plans for man. Michael, Gabriel, and Rafael are the only 3 names we know.



ANGELS

LUK 22:43, MAT 18:10, HEB 13:2

Angels are closest to the material world and humanity. The lowest choir is where we get the majority of our personal guardian angels.



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*Angels are symbolically depicted with wings, but they are purely spiritual beings that do not have a physical body. They can take on the appearance of man to better communicate with humans.

SOURCES: SACRED SCRIPTURE, THE CELESTIAL HIERARCHY - PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, AND SUMMA THEOLOGIAE - THOMAS AQUINAS



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