

*This is the text of Father Fraser's homily on September 25, 2005.*

## ...with Angels and Archangels...

There are two equal and opposite ways to devalue something. One way is to ignore it, which says that it is unimportant. The second way is to give it lots of exposure but in trivial ways, which teaches that it has no significant value. The subjects of our celebration this morning – St Michael the Archangel and all the Holy Angels of God – have in recent times been devalued in both these ways.

Angels have been dismissed as religious fairy tales by those who consider themselves too intellectually sophisticated to believe such notions. On the other hand, angels have been trivialized in visual renderings (which almost always seem to be very bad art) as well as being the subject of non-theological myths and fantasies. For example, human beings do not become angels when they get to Heaven. Angels are a completely different order of God's creation.

The Catechism in the Prayer Book of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa is taken directly from our own 1979 Book of Common Prayer, but several sections have been added, including a section on angels:

*What is an angel?*

An angel is a spiritual creature and part of God's great unseen world. The word angel means messenger.

*Why are angels important to us?*

Beyond being messengers of God they are guardians to human beings against danger and temptation, and they watch over children. They remind us that we are part of a great spiritual world that is bound up with our material world.

*Is belief in angels scriptural?*

Yes. Mention of angels is found frequently in both the Old and the New Testaments. The Bible refers to cherubim, seraphim, archangels, and guardian angels. Angels played a significant role in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Catholic Theology – Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Old Catholic – teaches that:

Christ is the center of the angelic world. They are His angels. They belong to Him because they were created through and for Him. They belong to Him still more because He has made them messengers of His saving plan.

Angels have been present since creation and throughout the history of salvation, announcing this salvation and serving the accomplishment of the divine plan. From the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of Jesus Christ is surrounded by the adoration and service of angels.

They protect Jesus in His infancy, serve Him in the desert, strengthen Him in his agony in the garden. It is angels that proclaim the Good News of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection.

From its beginning, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.

Angels are a real part of God's creation. They are not physical; they do not have material bodies; but they are quite real. Like all of God's gifts, however, we must cooperate with God's will in order to receive the guidance and protection God promises us through their ministry.

One Anglican theologian, Dr J.I. Packer, has written that there are six common "road blocks" to our receiving God's guidance:

1. The unwillingness to think. God made us thinking beings, and He guides our minds as in His presence we think things out...
2. The unwillingness to think ahead and weigh the long-term consequences of alternative courses of action. "Think ahead" is part of the divine rule of life no less than the human rule of the road.
3. The unwillingness to take advice. It is a sign of conceit and immaturity to dispense with taking advice in major decisions.
4. The unwillingness to suspect oneself. We dislike being realistic with ourselves, and too often we do not know ourselves at all well; we can recognize rationalizations in others and quite overlook them in ourselves. We need to ask ourselves why we feel a particular course to be right, and make ourselves give reasons.
5. The unwillingness to discount personal magnetism. From time to time it has been possible for people with a flair for self-dramatization to gain an alarming domination over the minds and consciences of others, who fall under their spell and decline to judge them by ordinary standards. [Another expression of this is "peer pressure" or "keeping up with the Joneses."] Outstanding people are not, indeed, necessarily wrong, but they are not necessarily right either! They and their views must be respected but may not be idolized.
6. The unwillingness to wait. "Wait on the Lord: is a constant refrain in the Psalms, and it is a necessary word, for God often keeps us waiting. He is not in such a hurry as we are, and it is not His way to give more light on the future than we need for action in the present, or to guide us more than one step at a time. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God. When action is needed, light will come.

This same theologian concludes by saying:

Not merely does God will to guide us in the sense of showing us His way, that we may tread it; He wills also to guide us in the more fundamental sense of ensuring that, whatever happens, whatever mistakes we may make, we shall come safely home. Slippings and strayings there will be, no doubt, but the everlasting arms are beneath us; we shall be caught, rescued, restored. This is God's promise; this is how good He is.