

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Sep 29th 2018

Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, archangels

“War broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.”

Revelations

In the heart of Paris near Notre Dame Cathedral there's a powerful statue of St. Michael the Archangel based, most likely, on today's reading from Revelations. He's armed for battle – a million miles from the images of Hallmark Christmas card angels that typify American depictions of angels.

Of course neither the statue of St. Michael nor the lacy angel that tops my Christmas tree is theologically accurate because Catholics believe that angels are pure spirits. We often talk about the angels and the saints but they are very different. Heck, we've seen some of our favorite modern saints like Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II on TV. There's no need to imagine what they did or how they looked.

So if angels are pure spirits, what do we make of today's reading from Revelations?

The story recounts a symbolic heavenly clash between good and evil that parallels the ongoing earthly struggle between these opposing forces. In Revelations, God uses angels and dragons as his instruments. In this world, he uses us, if we are willing.

We emulate Michael (minus the sword) every time we stand up for the least of God's people or work for peace, justice and kindness etc. From the story in Revelations, we learn that we need courage and support from others to defeat the forces of evil just as Michael did.

Although not included in today's passage, Scripture writers often depict angels as messengers. Since this also is the feast of Archangels Gabriel and Raphael, we should recall Gabriel's role in the Annunciation and Raphael's mission to Tobias in the Old Testament. These stories of angels remind us that we too can be God's messengers to others.

It's interesting that the first prayer that many mothers teach their children is the “Angel of God.” Like countless others, I said it every night when my mom put me to bed. Is it possible that our moms were our real guardian angels? They also were the messengers who first taught us about God. If you had an angelic mom as I do (she's 95), I hope this makes you smile.

And remember that even if angels are pure spirits, we can emulate them in fighting for good and in being messengers of God's love to others.

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