

## **St Michael & All Angels**

Happy Michaelmas everyone! The last line from our Hebrews reading is a question or, is it a great theological statement?

“Are not all angels’ spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for those who are to inherit salvation?”

Yes, they most certainly are, dear sisters and brothers! God’s angels are his messengers who, as well as offering unceasing worship before the throne of heaven, are also sent to help and protect God’s people on earth.

You don’t have to be a choir member to become an angel, but the floaty white surplices certainly give that impression! You don’t have to be ordained either, like St Michael who was put in charge of the heavenly host. As an Archangel, he is not to be confused with an Archdeacon – who are really ‘middle management’! No, Michael has a different kind of authority which belongs to a world which banishes darkness and evil, and who acts as a mediator between heaven and earth ‘melding’ the two together as our worship and our ‘making’ Eucharist does the same: uniting earth with heaven. As we offer this Eucharist in communion with all the heavenly host, we pray for grace to live our lives as heralds of the good news of God’s kingdom. Here’s just one example from Michelangelo (just a shame that it is not an original)...

Is it a boy or girl and does it really matter? Angels are not supposed to be gender specific. But there is a wonderful sense of playfulness here, arms stretched out pointing to God’s presence and wonder, around, above, and below. There

is no place where angels are exempt with or without their translucent wings of divine flight.

You might be sitting next to one. You might know one who is on manoeuvres. You may be so very thankful that you have been 'saved' by one. In our prayers today, we will definitely be thinking particularly of those children, damaged or brutally killed by war and terrorism – their angelic adventures are just beginning, as God welcomes them into His everlasting arms.

Is it no wonder then that there are so many biblical and artistic examples of why God's angels and saints matter, why they are cherished, and why they are redeemed? This is not to think and speak of angels simply colloquially but also spiritually and, theologically. Our worship here is not like an English lesson with its own grammar of assent; rather it is about expressing with all our senses, the mystery of the incarnation, God with us and in our midst, God present in the sacrament of bread and wine, made sacred like the heavenly banquet to come and the food of eternal life prepared for each of us. Remember that African spiritual, 'Michael, row the boat ashore! Alleluia!' referring to Michael's inviting and receiving the souls of the departed into those mansions of the heavenly realm. And think of dear Dame Maggie Smith telling Michael now that she doesn't need any instructing from him where to be sat, thank you!

Many, many years ago now, I remember what then was a cult theological tome by Rudolph Otto, called 'The Idea of the

Holy' ...Could I find it on my bookshelves? No! But to give you a very crude summary it concerned this whole matter of accepting and giving due importance to the non-rational in our religious imagination. He calls this experience of 'the numinous' in terms of a Latin phrase, '**mysterium tremendum**' or '**wholly other**' we might say. I recollect it on today's feast because of the three component parts he alludes to: awfulness (inspiring awe, a sort of profound unease), overpoweringness (that which, among other things, inspires a feeling of humility), and energy (creating an impression of immense vigour).

Of course, I come back to Michelangelo who seemed to understand all this well before Otto took his philosophical pen to paper. And I come back to today's Gospel when Jesus speaks with Nathaniel in that everyday conversational way until he slips in the unexpected statement which, I believe to be, our theological truth and climax:

"Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Think of today, then, as a celebration (where words so often fail us) of the catholic and apostolic faith we believe in and live by. Think of our celebration with a little help or, a lot of help: from the angels of God who surround our senses and our common life in Christ, with the sheer joy of God's 'heilig' – 'holy' presence.

St Michael, Gabriel and Raphael: pray for us. Amen.

