

# YOU and the ANGELS

## Adoring the Sacred Heart Together

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

Each of us, as we were taught in our catechism lessons, has a guardian angel assigned especially to us by God. We may not be conscious of this, but if we had eyes that could see spiritual realities, we might be surprised to be followed by a heavenly being during our entire lifetime. And we might be really astonished to find out that God is sending (has sent) many, many blessed spirits to our earth to assist us. As a Marian priest once pointed out to us: we would be overwhelmed if we could visualize all the angels that surround the altar during the celebration of a single holy Mass. In fact, one book on angels conjectures that there are as many angels as there are stars in the sky.

In this month of October, the Church invites us to commemorate a marvelous array of saints and angels. The Marians at Eden Hill in Stockbridge celebrate their special patron St. Faustina (1905—1938) on the 5th and we Visitandines here in Tyringham celebrate St. Margaret Mary (1647—1690) on the 16th. Both St. Faustina and St. Margaret Mary had, as you know, important messages from the Heart of Jesus: the former, centering around God's unfathomable mercy toward us and the latter, centering around God's unfathomable love toward us. However, another prominent aspect of their mystical experiences was their unique relationship with the angels. Both of these saints had significant encounters with these heavenly spirits. Today I would like to dwell on some of their angelic experiences and see how the angels helped them and how they can help us in our lives to give glory to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In the *Autobiography of St. Margaret Mary*, written at the request of her spiritual director, she wonderfully describes what happened one day while she was outside picking hemp with the rest of the community. In order to work closer to the part of the monastery where the Chapel was, Margaret Mary retreated to a small courtyard and continued to do her task on her knees. Suddenly, she felt utterly recollected in body and soul. Then she saw the Heart of Jesus in a vision—so lovable, so worthy of adoration, outshining the sun. It was surrounded by flames of love and all around this Sacred Heart were the heavenly Seraphim singing in wondrous harmony: "Love triumphs, love rejoices, love of the Sacred Heart gladdens!" She tells us that the Seraphim invited her to join them in their praises of the Divine Heart, but she felt too unworthy. Reprimanding her, they told her that was why they were there, to join with her in an unending homage of love, adoration and praise. They said they were going to take her place in front of the Blessed Sacrament so she would be able, thanks to them, to love the Sacred Heart uninterruptedly. And they would in turn have a share in her love by participating in her sufferings and sacrifices. These blessed spirits, Margaret Mary says, drew up a deed of partnership, inscribing it on the Sacred Heart with letters of gold. This vision, which lasted 2—3 hours, stayed with our saint all her life and since that day she always referred to the angels as her "partners."

Saint Margaret Mary also had the privilege of seeing her guardian angel. She confides to us: "I had the happiness of seeing him many a time, this angel of mine, and often he'd find fault with me and correct me. There was the time when I was about to involve myself in a discussion over the marriage of one of my relatives... My good angel reprimanded me severely and let me know that such behavior was unworthy of a religious. If ever I took part in that sort of gossip again, he said, he wouldn't let me see him anymore."

Besides these heavenly visitors, Margaret Mary was subjected to temptations from the evil one, but God always had the upper hand. In the narrative of her life, she informs us that the devil would make her fall and break whatever she was carrying and then laugh in her face. "Once," she writes, "when I was carrying a pan of red-hot coals, he (the devil) pushed me from the top of the stairs. I was quite unscathed when I reached the bottom, and the coals were still in the pan; but those who saw me fall were sure I'd broken my legs. However, I'd been conscious of my guardian angel supporting me."

These three episodes from the life of St. Margaret Mary show us that the angels helped her in very definite ways: 1) they actually joined with her in adoring and praising the Heart of Jesus 2) they directed her away from worldly gossip that would dissipate her spiritual life 3) they protected her from evil intentions and preserved her from bodily harm.

Now we can implore the angels to assist us in these areas too. You may be wondering if that second statement is really relevant to the laity. If we have to live in the world, then it seems pretty hard not to become worldly. Yet, it appears that Our Holy Father Pope Francis is much concerned about the growth of worldliness in the Church and that includes clergy, religious and laity. In his recent October 4th talk in Assisi, he said: "We are in grave danger. We are in danger of worldliness. Those who attempt to act as Christians without renouncing their worldly attitudes become 'pastry-shop Christians'—nice sweet things, but no real Christians." He continued, "The worldly spirit kills, it kills people. It kills the Church." This is what the angel was trying to warn St. Margaret Mary about. She had slipped into the mode of trying to be nice in the world's way of thinking. But according to God's way, compromise with worldliness, as the Pope points out "leads to vanity, self-importance, pride. And this is an idol, it is not God. It is an idol! And idolatry is the gravest sin of all!"

Let's turn our attention to St. Faustina now. Reading her *Diary* gives us numerous instances of this saint's encounters with the angels. We can read about her guardian angel escorting her to the realms of hell, to purgatory and before the throne of God in heaven. In her life, St. Faustina met and kept company with angels of various ranks in the celestial hierarchy. These angelic interventions never obscured God but led her to an ever greater appreciation of God's works and gifts. The angels have the God-given right and power to influence and guide us. So it benefits us tremendously when we remember their presence and ask their assistance. Here is a good example from St. Faustina how God's angels helped her. Once St. Faustina asked the Lord to arrange it that no evil person would dare come to the gate of her convent. She heard these words interiorly: "My daughter, the moment you went to the gate I set a cherub over it to guard it. Be at peace." Faustina says that after returning from her conversation with the Lord in the Chapel, she saw a little white cloud and in it a cherub with his hands joined. His gaze was like lightning and she understood how the fire of God's love burns in that look... So we see, angelic protection is available for the asking. Do we take advantage of it?

Here in our monastery we are constantly reminded about the presence of the angels. There is an old custom in the Visitation Order that we have still kept here in Tyringham. It is to attach a plaque or picture of a guardian angel outside of each Sister's cell (bedroom) door. Our plaques are antique and were removed from the cell doors of our Wilmington monastery and then refurbished for our new monastery. When I see that plaque on my door, I am reminded that my good angel is with me and is protecting me. I personally salute my angel each day and thank him (or her) for all the service he renders me. Unlike one of our deceased sisters buried in our cemetery, I have never seen my guardian angel yet I sense his special efforts to assist me. (The Sister I am referring to was named Sr. Mary Angelica Shankland and according to the account written after her death, she admitted that she regularly saw her guardian angel.)

Other visual reminders of the angels cover our monastery walls and appear in our garden. In the Sisters' part of the chapel we have a large relieve (wood carving) of the Sacred Heart appearing to St. Margaret Mary. Gazing on this apparition are three angels who share the ecstasy of that exchange of love between Creator and creature. In our central stairway, a beautiful over-sized mural of this same apparition includes nine cherubs who watch in wonder as Jesus reveals his burning heart to St. Margaret Mary. So the angels are with us, waiting to assist us in every circumstance that befalls us in our unpredictable lives. They are near us and when we turn our attention to them and ask God to help us through them, they can do their work in amazing ways. They are the special envoys of the Heart of Jesus, carrying his love and care to us in life's myriad dilemmas.

This past summer I have been particularly thinking about the angels in Sacred Heart devotion ever since I read about the mysterious priest who appeared at the site of an auto crash in Missouri, early in August this year. You will recall that emergency crews had been called to extricate a 19 year old girl trapped in her car. She was pinned in between the steering wheel and the seat while the car sat on its side. About an hour into the rescue, the girl, feeling she was fading, asked the rescue workers to pray out loud with her. And that's when a priest appeared out of the blue. It was a Catholic priest who anointed her and prayed over her. A sense of calm descended on the girl and the workers and shortly afterward another rescue team appeared with fresh equipment and got the girl out. She was flown to the hospital and workers turned to thank the priest who was nowhere to be found. This story caused quite a sensation in the media. People were conjecturing that since the priest's photo was not on anyone's camera, that perhaps an angel had done the job. As time went by, a humble priest reluctantly came forward to acknowledge his part. He, in my estimation, was the "angelic instrument" used by a loving God to assist this poor girl, who seems to be recovering nicely. This is indeed fascinating. It demonstrates that many people out there believe in angels or at least want to believe in them. [In fact, a 2006 AP-AOL poll found that 81% believed in angels.] But as you know from living out in the world, all kinds of diverse and sometimes outlandish literature promote angels and are making alot of money off them. New Agers are really into angels and we now even have what's called angel therapy. So be careful, in your selection of reading material. Angels are from God and they cannot be separated from Him. They are God's creation and God uses them as carriers of his messages and his power in order to help us in our earthly lives.

I have found it intensely interesting that my recent preoccupation with angels and the Sacred Heart is shared by others. In researching this topic I discovered that a new icon of the Sacred Heart which has been commissioned is conspicuous for its depiction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus enthroned and surrounded by angels. On viewing this work, the iconographer wants us to chant with the angels their great hymn of praise, Holy, Holy, Holy, before the Sacred Heart enthroned so that we can participate in their work of praise, just like St. Margaret Mary did. He deftly explains why he crafted this icon like he did, which, I believe, sums up beautifully our whole reflection today. He writes: "Their (the angels) presence in the icon should serve to prompt us to reflect on the way in which Christ is the center of the angelic world. They are his angels. They belong to him! We are called to make the Sacred Heart the center of our world. We call upon the angelic world to help us belong wholeheartedly to Him." +

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*This talk on Sacred Heart spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on October 6, 2013. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the Sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday, November 3, 2013 at 4:00 p.m.*