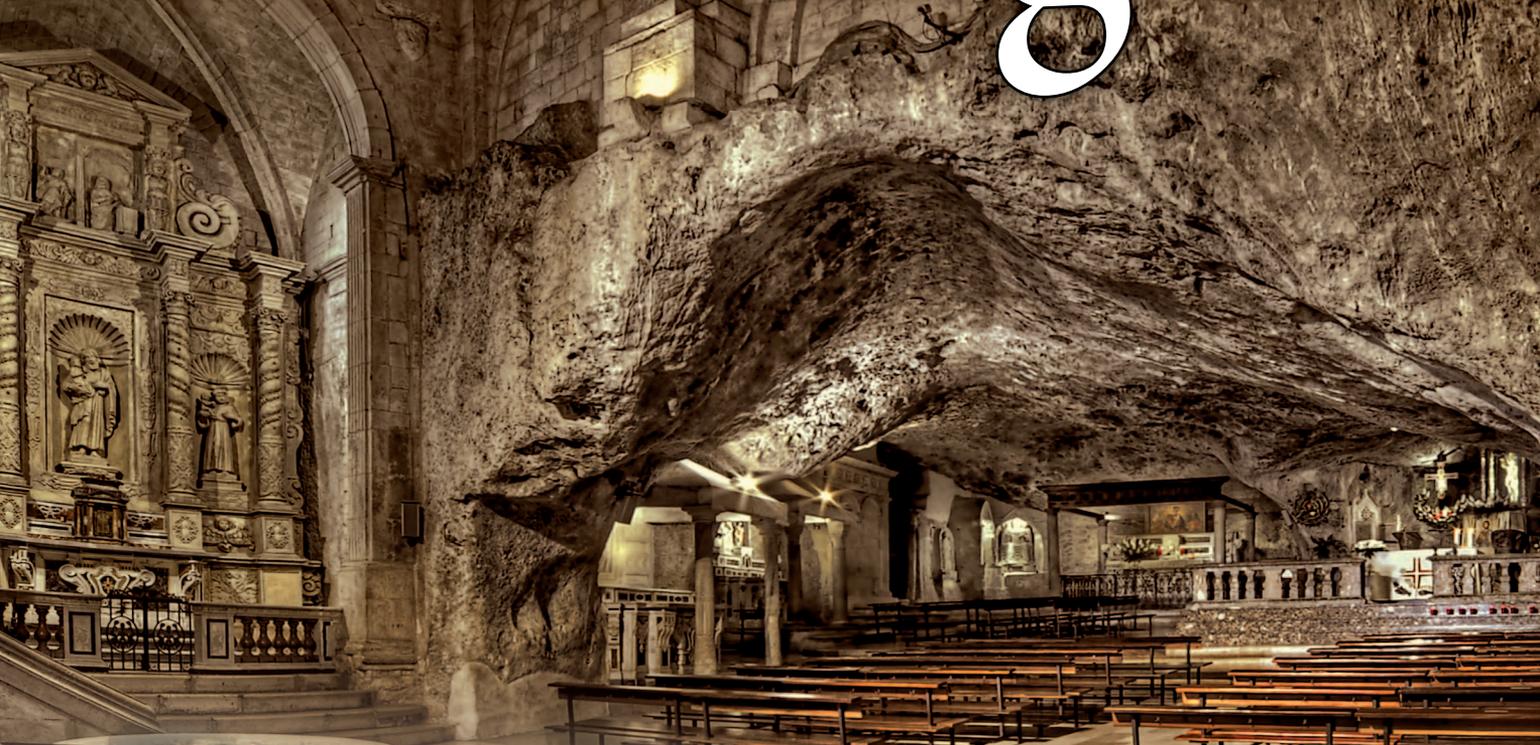




Messengers from a loving God

The Angels



The Divine Fighter

Welcome Home,
what kept you!

The Power of Powerlessness

Why bad things happen
to the innocent?

Our Lady of Guadeloupe

Make room for God



DEAR READERS

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the tenth quarterly edition of “The Angels, Messengers from a loving God”. Thank you for all your emails and letters. We are glad to hear that the magazine gives you knowledge and inspiration for living a holy life.

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart. Angels usually help a person develop spiritually in an invisible way; like St Faustina who had contact with her guardian angel, St Michael the Archangel, a seraph and a cherub. She was often consoled and defended by angels who became her best friends. St Faustina’s devotion to the holy angels helped her in many situations, including making her confession which was at times difficult for her. (D 175) Confessing one’s sins multiplies the grace of healing. What’s more when we meet Jesus present in confession we develop our friendship with the Son of God, there is no need for us to be afraid. One day Jesus said to Sister Faustina ‘If it were not for this imperfection you would not have come to me.’

Angels do not make decisions for us but they are there 24 hours a day waiting for us to ask for their help and guidance. They are messengers who encourage and assist us on our way to heaven if we call on them. Angels were companions to Sister Faustina during her mystical experiences. Whilst on her

mission of conveying the message about Divine Mercy to the whole world she was given the help and graces needed to perform her tasks by God.

I would kindly ask you to let others know about our magazine and distribute it all over the world. We look forward to any questions or feedback. I would be interested to hear from you by letter or email and to relate any testimonies on how the angels have helped you in your life.

I encourage you to call on your Guardian Angel for help and protection for yourselves, for your families and friends. If Popes, Padre Pio and many other saints called on the angels and St Michael daily, so should we.

I assure you of the constant prayer of the priests of the Congregation of Saint Michael the Archangel for all the readers and their families.

Since 29th January 2012 our Order is continuing the celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the death of our founder Blessed Father Bronislaw Markiewicz who had a great devotion to Our Blessed Mother and St Michael the Archangel.

God bless you.

Father Peter Prusakiewicz CSMA

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The Angels

Messengers from a Loving God

A Catholic Quarterly Magazine on Holy Angels

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Padre Pio The Divine Fighter

The life of Padre Pio may be described with just one sentence from the Gospel: “When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected.” (Luke 12:48)

Padre Pio’s spiritual life was extremely rich: he had revelations and had received stigmata. He also had the ability to see into people’s souls, work miracles in the name of God and had a close relationship with his Guardian Angel. However, all these graces came at a high personal cost to him. Stigmata were considered to be a great honour but few people realised how much physical suffering they caused, particularly during the days of Christ’s Passion. When alone, Padre Pio was also tormented by Satan.

God’s Divine Plan

As a young boy Francesco Forgione became familiar with God’s divine plan for him. At the age of 15 he had a vision: “By his side he saw a majestic man of unusual beauty radiating like the sun. He took his hand and said, “*Come with me for it is appropriate for you to fight as a brave warrior.*” The man led him on to a spacious plain crowded with many people. They were divided into two groups. One of them was wearing white robes whereas the other was dressed in black clothes. Suddenly, a man appeared; he was so tall that his forehead touched the clouds. The companion at his side said that he should fight with the monster.



My good guardian angel

On becoming a religious brother it became clear that a monastery was not a shelter from Satan. Quite the contrary, the Devil attacked Padre Pio more often than before. Other monks had to get used to strange noises coming from Padre Pio's cell at night and seeing his bruised face at breakfast in the morning. The saintly priest could not even read his letters because Satan made them unreadable. Padre Pio sprinkled sheets of paper with holy water and prayed to see the contents of the letters. This method was suggested to him by his Guardian Angel. Padre Pio wrote to Father Augustine: *"With the help of my good Guardian Angel we triumphed over the cunning enemy and I could read your letter."*

Holy water

Padre Pio shared his experience of evil spirits with people who had a similar problem. One of them was his spiritual daughter Josephine Morgera. In his letters Padre Pio often advised her to make use of holy water. He wrote: *"I encourage you, for the sake of the very core of Divine Mercy, not to be afraid of Satan, the enemy of our salvation. He cannot do any harm to genuine children of God. Remember that God has given a Guardian Angel to you. He is always your companion. He will never abandon you."*

Apart from prayers and suggestions for the afflicted, the holy monk fought with the Devil by himself. He wrote to Father Benedictine: *"I do not have spare time. I spend my time releasing my brothers from Satan's*

traps. May the Lord be Blessed. Please, stop nagging at me in the name of love because the greatest love is snatching souls from the Devil's hands and lead them to Jesus Christ. This is what I do permanently, day and night."

Pray the Rosary

The very basic element of his relationship with his Saviour was through prayer. Padre Pio was seen regularly praying in the monastery corridors or in a confessional. He constantly moved Rosary beads under his habit even when talking with people. On the question of how many Rosaries he said every day and how could he do it, he answered: "Sometimes forty, sometimes fifty and you? How can you not say the Rosary?"

Padre Pio liked novenas to St Joseph, St Michael the Archangel, St Anthony, St Francis, St Rita, St Therese of Jesus and Our Lady of Pompey. He also loved the chaplet to the Holiest Heart of Jesus Christ, which he said regularly, every day until his death.

Evangelical truth

Having realized what evil was and how it could destroy his relationship with God, Padre Pio tried not to succumb to temptations. His letters carry a lot of information on the deceitful activity of evil spirits as well as the ways of resistance to their traps. He is the best example of the evangelical truth that even the most severe humiliations including beating and mental torment could not drive us away from the only genuine Love.

Father **Peter Blazejczyk**



Prayer for Priests

Oh my Jesus I beg You on behalf of the whole Church: Grant it love and the light of Your Spirit, and give power to the words of priests so that hardened hearts might be brought to repentance and return to You, O Lord. Lord, give us holy priests; You yourself maintain them in holiness. O Divine and Great High Priest, may the power of your mercy accompany them everywhere and protect them from the devil's traps and snares which are continually being set for the souls of priests. May the power of Your mercy, O Lord, shatter and bring to naught all that might tarnish the sanctity of priests, for You can do all things. (Diary 1052)

Touched by Amazing Grace

(Part 2)



Welcome Home, what kept you!

In the last Issue, Susie Smith described her childhood as an unwanted child of an unhappy marriage, her struggle to retain her faith amid university life, her rise to become MD of her own company in London and the so called “good life” of material success. But everything was to change by her chance meeting with an Anglican priest on the way to a business lunch in the City of London.

The priest I had met at that lunchtime communion service in the City of London was persistent. From time to time I'd see him in the street, “Hello Susie, how are you?” he would ask with a genuine engaging smile. The truth was I was not doing well. I was still feeling adrift from God and by now my friend's offer to go to a meeting for transcendental meditation was becoming even more tempting.

I mentioned to the priest that God seemed distant so I was about to take up transcendental meditation.

He asked if I had ever considered Christian meditation. This intrigued me and he kindly arranged several meetings for me. In time I came to realise just how much my image of God had become so fixed and stern. He'd become a hard judgemental God in my head that I could never please.

The priest was patient

Deep down in my heart I did not see that God loved me unconditionally, I had lost that sense of the love of Jesus. So, the priest became my spiritual director and I learned about Christian meditation and contemplative prayer. He was patient and always reflected a sense of conditional positive regard towards me. He loaned me books, challenged me and made me angry at times, but he was always right, but then he was very much a man of prayer. I started to want that depth of relationship with God! By now I was saying a little prayer before I started my working day, each evening I would spend an hour after a busy day in the office, just waiting for God, opening my heart and soul to Him and...nothing! This went on for eighteen months, nothing. I was

beginning to feel I should give this up, when one evening I was caught up into an awesome mystical experience of the Love of God. Words are inadequate to describe it!

From then on things changed. When you know that nothing you can ever do will make God love you more, or less than He loves you now, it changes you. You are filled with thankfulness and gratitude for God's unconditional love; the love that led Jesus to Calvary for each one of us. All He asks of us is that we love Him. Jesus said “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn: 13:34). Jesus' words in the gospels constantly challenged me, it was as if I was hearing them anew; the knowledge of God's love drew me ever more closely to Him. I wanted to love and serve Him, not out of fear anymore, but out of love.

I needed to make radical changes. Life was not about money and status symbols! I was grateful for God putting that persistent cleric in my path, had he not had such depth and understanding through his counselling experience, I might never have ventured on this journey with the Lord. Gradually, God brought other people into my life, those who had also been wounded by life's experiences too, I

felt inadequate to help, I did not have the experience of the trained counsellor or the spiritual depth of my spiritual director. His answer was simple: I could keep working on my prayer life and relationship with God, and study psychotherapy. So I did just that! I sold the company and embarked on a four year course for counselling in London, at a very distinguished institute, which entailed having personal therapy too for that time.

St Michael I need help

It was not easy to become a student again and the course was tough and challenging. But it was rewarding too, to discover why we fall into patterns of belief or behaviour. There were many magical “ah! Moments”, when the light bulb went on! It was not a place where you could hide behind a false self, this journey was about discovering who you really are, and sometimes reality is painful. But my prayer life was strong, the Catholic Church in the square became a spiritual home, and of course lying at the back with the notices and prayer leaflets were some St Michael prayer cards. “Defend us in our hour of conflict, be our safeguard...” Looking back I can remember reading those words, and saying to myself, “Yes, St Michael, I need all the help I can get!” At the end of four years of training, I set up a private practice. Sadly, most of the people in society who needed counselling rarely could afford the fees; to redress the balance, I worked voluntarily for a day each week with a London charity helping victims of sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse. There was much to pray about! But, life was



■ Icon written (painted) by the hand of Susie Smith, Ballintubber

becoming too busy in London and I felt drawn to the quiet and tranquillity of the countryside.

Something happened in my heart

This longing for silence led to another radical decision. I left London and moved to a quiet village in the Romney Marsh, a few miles from the sea. Clearly not the place for a counsellor to set up practice, but I hoped to

find some meaningful work, and sure enough there was a charity that needed my management skills. In October of that year I set off on pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi. As I crossed the Tiber past Castel Sant’Angelo surmounted with the beautiful statue of St Michael... On my way to a Papal Mass in St Peters, I did not realise that it was to be only a few months before I would indeed be “going over to Rome”. In the Basilica I could not see the Pope-mobile come in carrying the then very frail Pope John Paul II. But I could hear the applause of the congregation, and see the flashes of cameras; then something happened in

my heart, I was aware of the great joy and blessing of being in the presence of this deeply holy Pope. I so wanted to see him, and miraculously at the time of communion I found myself quite close to the altar and could see His Holiness clearly. I floated out of the Basilica! It was one of the most profound experiences of my life!

St Francis and St Clare

On to Assisi! The first Franciscan church I entered was the Portuincola, the tiny church inside the beautiful Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels. Francis so loved this place that it was here that he chose to be when he was dying. It is indeed a holy place, you can sense the holy angels there! I prayed fervently there for three things: to be sure of my vocation, for holiness of life, and to learn more of the way of St Francis; I was unaware that St Francis said whoever prayed in that place in penitence and faith would have their prayers answered!

I visited San Damiano, and knelt in prayer before the Crucifix, as Francis had, when he heard Christ tell him “to repair His Church”... thinking to myself how holy St Francis was, unlike me a sinner. It was then that I heard the Lord speaking in the depths of my soul. It seemed I too had a small role to play in God’s great plan! I stood outside San Damiano in the weak autumn sun trying to comprehend this awesome experience. A Franciscan nun came up to me, she smiled and placed a small prayer card in my hand, it had a picture of St Clare on it and her blessing: “May the Lord bless and protect you. May He make His face to shine upon you and grant you His mercy. May He look upon

you and give you His peace. May the Lord be with you always and may you always be with Him.” As I read that last sentence tears rolled down my face, I knew that was my deepest desire. The nun hugged me and led me by the hand back into the cloister, she picked a little purple flower from a terracotta pot and gave it to me...As I walked up the hill from San Damiano, I wanted to throw my diamonds, designer jacket & Gucci bag into the olive trees, I wanted to be free of possessions like Francis, something had radically changed, my soul was flooded with an overwhelming sense of joy, which has never left me.

Jesus I Trust in You

Within three months of returning home, I resigned my prestigious job, the company car and perks, and found myself spending time with Franciscan friars and sisters at the Study Centre in Canterbury. I did indeed learn more of St Francis and of St Faustina!

I discovered St Faustina in prison!!! I was involved in chaplaincy work at a high security prison in Kent, soon I was driving there with a car full of friars and sisters. One day, after Easter we went into the prison chapel and on the stark brick wall hung the most beautiful image of Jesus in a white robe with “Jesus I trust in You” written beneath His feet. I felt so drawn to that image of Jesus, His compassionate eyes, and I wanted to know more. “Ah, how beautiful, Jesus the Divine Mercy” said the friar and he gave me a copy of the Divine Mercy Novena prayers...

I took time out to do the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, the 19th Annotation. It was an experience that transformed my life. It became

clear to me and my director for this long retreat that I was being called to a life of prayer, to be with Jesus. It was equally clear I was to convert to the Catholic Church! There was great joy among the friars and my parish priest Father Fred who said, “Welcome Home, what kept you!” This joy soon gave way to sadness as



we heard that same day that the Holy Father had died. I cried when I heard the Pope’s last audible words, on hearing tens of thousands of young people singing in St. Peter’s Square as he lay in his deathbed, Friday, April 1, 2005: “I sought you out and now you come to me. Thank you.” In a strange way I felt they were meant for me too...

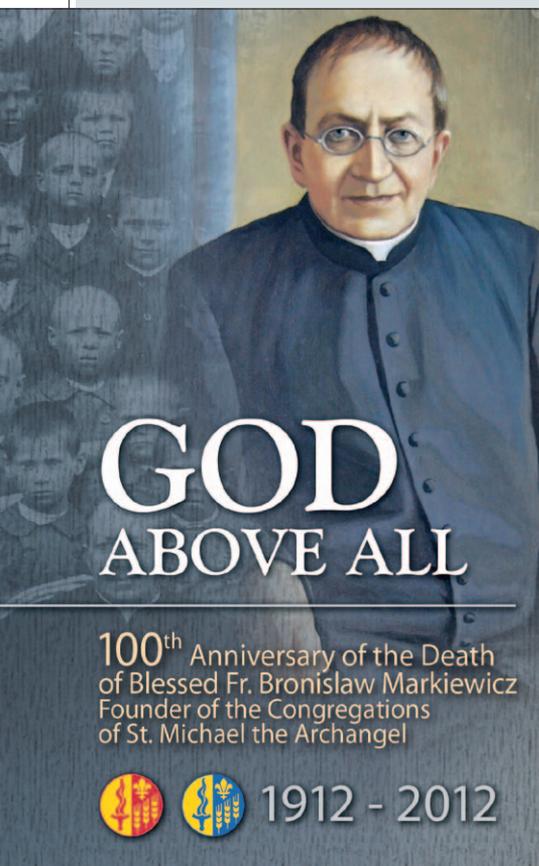
Little did I know that day where that “yes” to God’s Will would lead me..... to the cloister, with St Faustina as my guide, and beyond...

Susie Smith

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Claremorris, Co Mayo, Ireland
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Love, humility and self-sacrifice was his trademark

Blessed Father Bronislaw Markiewicz



Father Bronislaw began his ministry as assistant priest in a parish where he spent long hours in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament before the tabernacle. He was also professor of the local major seminary and recognised from his writings as a prophet. From the start of his priestly life, he was particularly sensitive towards the religious, moral and material neglect of children. In addition, he sought to alleviate the misery of the local poor folk who suffered severe hardship. Also, he spoke strongly against the national vices of the Polish nation, such as excessive drinking of alcohol. In his opinion the solution of social problems depended upon the appropriate education of young people and on changing the moral climate of the whole of society.

Two pillars of social life

Father Bronislaw said “The world is falling apart because men have destroyed the two pillars of social life, “work and temperance”. Instead, they have placed the emphasis predominately upon intellectual instruction and on science and letting go of “work and temperance”.

And yet, our Creator, who knows our needs better than we do, recommends that after having suffered the loss of the bread of life and our salvation, that we should work with the sweat of our brow and that we should observe temperance. He expressly says to our first parents in Paradise “By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken.” (Gen,3, 19) Jesus Christ in his Gospel adds: “If a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and begin to follow in my footsteps” (Mt 16, 24) . This means: That not only I, your Saviour, have to work hard and suffer, but also all of you, my disciples, if you want to be with me in Paradise, you have to suffer and work, submitting your intellect, will and works to the prescriptions of the Commandments of God.

You must commit your body with all its senses and inclinations to the continual service of the Divine, fighting and working, day and night, for his glory during your whole life until death. “The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh”. (Gal. 5:17)

Work and temperance are not acquired easily. In order to avoid being overcome in battle we must rigorously

The Congregation of St Michael the Archangel was founded by Blessed Father Bronislaw Markiewicz. Born on 13th July 1842 in Pruchnik near Jaroslaw (south-eastern Poland), he was a priest of the Przemyśl Diocese and was a revered churchman recognised for his spirit of sacrifice.

control our body and all its natural inclinations, like a coachman holds on tightly to the reins of an untamed horse so that they both do not end up on the brink.

The Son of God, in human flesh walks before us lighting our path with his example, in order to lighten the burden which the Creator has placed upon us and to exhort us to a voluntary renunciation of our very selves. Jesus worked willingly and by the sweat of his brow in St Joseph's workshop, he endured the sufferings and the privations of daily life, finally he died on the cross suffering horrible pain. He did not spare himself and did not give in to anything in order to teach us how we are to live in every situation. His Mother, followed him closely, the sorrowful Mother who worked and suffered during her whole life. Behind her come the thousands of saints who have "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires". (Gal:5:24).

Christian temperance devalued

Father Bronislaw added, "Instead today, throughout the whole world and unfortunately among Christian nations, this command seems to resound: Let us seek to enjoy life to the fullest on this earth and to work as little as possible. Money, power, rest, diversion, pleasures and honours today constitute the ideal of all of humanity, while work by sweat of the brow and Christian temperance are totally devalued. Only those who are forced to do so work and suffer. But, very few work freely and are temperate in the spirit of Jesus Christ. The majority of today's people are not aware that work and Christian temperance gain spiritually a hundredfold already on this earth. Abandonment of

temperance, instead, brings about not only the risk of eternal punishment and of hell, but also earthly disasters

The effeminate world refuses to accept the bitter means of Christian mortification to heal the sickness of the spirit. It is precisely mortification which heals the "things of the earth" (Phil.3, 19.) Also, the inclinations which wound man's soul and leads to perdition. By means of mortification we pay, already on this earth, the temporal punishments which we have deserved because of our sins. Self denial raises our soul to heavenly realities and enables it to be united to God. Only those who are mortified have the gift of prayer which is indispensable for salvation. Christian discipline helps us to acquire, already on this earth, interior peace and the joy of the Spirit. Therefore, mortification, which consists of work and Christian temperance, constitutes the indispensable condition for, and is the source of spiritual wealth and of human happiness, in this present life and in the future

Work and temperance are, thus, the most important pillars of social life. Only there, where they are solidly grounded, are well-being, health, strength, peace, freedom and independence possible.

We need not only instruct the youth on these two pillars of social life but also to have them actively put them into practice, encouraging them by our own example. We need to pray, many times throughout the day, for the understanding and realization of these two conditions for happiness. We need to base our scholastic system and our whole education principally on these two pillars. Thus will we find abundant means for the social betterment of our own people and that of neighbouring nations. In this way, the brotherhood of nations will be extended and a more glorious period in the history of humanity will dawn."

Inspired by St John Bosco

Following the Divine Voice, Father Markiewicz went to Italy and was inspired by the work of St John Bosco. In 1892, seven years later, he returned to Poland and was put in charge of the parish in Miejsce Piastowe (south-eastern Poland). In addition, to his pastoral work, he provided a widespread educational system, which not only included the academic but also dealt with the spiritual and physical development of the children in the houses / orphanages he established. He had a great devotion to Our Blessed Mother and would take the poor abandoned orphaned boys in his care to her statue on the altar of his church and say "She is your mother, come to her with all your problems and she will answer you." This was a great comfort for the young boys.

Father Bronislaw Markiewicz felt a stricter order with firm principles was needed and soon thought of founding a new religious congregation.

On 23rd September 1897, he petitioned the Bishop of Przemysl and the Pope to allow him to found the Congregation of St Michael the Archangel. In spite of intensive efforts on his part, Father Markiewicz did not live to witness its approval and died on 29th January 1912. On 29th September 1921, Adam Stefan Sapieha, Bishop of Cracow, issued the Erecting Decree of the Congregation. On 15th June 1966, the Congregation was affirmed under papal law. Father Bronislaw Markiewicz's beatification took place in Warsaw on June 19, 2005.

Agata Pawlowska
CSMA Editorial Office Poland.
Noreen Bavister, UK

My hopes and dreams for the youth

Let us build together and make a difference



Dear Readers,

I want to thank you for your kindness and generosity. I trust in God with all my heart and know that with Him the impossible is possible. You have given me a glimmer of hope in a seemingly hopeless situation.

Since my open letter to you in the last issue of *The Angels* magazine my project to build a pastoral youth centre is starting to bear fruit. I am very grateful for your generosity and want to thank all those who have responded.

For every pound donated we will be able to buy a brick for the centre. This may sound like a lot of money but the cost of building and materials are high in Belarus.

One day this beautiful new building will run and function like the one built in Miejsce Piastowe, near Krosno in Poland. It will be a warm, secure and loving place that pulsates with life and happiness and will give the youth in Gatowo, who aimlessly wonder the streets day and night, a place to go. There they will find peace, joy and the love of God. Every child deserves that.

The centre will provide a place where they can play games, play football, dance, listen and learn music, read books and



receive assistance with their education. There is a desperate need and it would be wonderful for others more fortunate to help give these children a good chance in life. A project for young alcoholics will also be offered to help them find the way to inner peace and freedom from sin and addiction.

Man needs Divine Mercy

I have never before seen how much man needs Divine Mercy. During this Easter Triduum I heard confession from two men who were courageous enough to come to me. Neither had been to confession for some time, one for seven years the other for twenty-three years. At the Holy Mass they received Holy

Communion and I saw tears in their eyes. The people of Belarus have beautiful, precious souls but neither mankind nor an individual finds peace and serenity unless they find the Divine Mercy.

Maybe not in my lifetime, but once the youth centre is complete we will build a beautiful church in honour of St Michael the Archangel.

To give is to live

As you can see from the pictures we have a chapel built around an old 1950's caravan. The children are inside celebrating Christmas. Local parishioners have kindly helped to make improvements by painting the chapel white and adding a new red tiled roof. You can see me inside the old caravan with some local volunteers.



“I want to gather millions of abandoned children from all countries and races – to feed and clothe them for free in body and soul”

Blessed Bronislaw Markiewicz founder of CSMA

The block of flats in the photo is where hundreds of families live, my chapel is on it's own on the right hand side. The people who attend Mass stand outside in all weathers without any complaints. In the near future I would like to buy paving slabs for my parishioners to stand on so they do not sink into the mud on a cold wet day.

We chose the name “Wind from the East” for our project - the wind is a sign of the Holy Spirit blowing from the heart of Eastern Europe (from Belarus). Since my article in the last issue of The Angel magazine many hearts have

been touched with the grace of God. Together we can achieve this dream and make it a reality.

Easy ways to Pay

Father General of my congregation has recently opened a new bank account for this Michaelites Mission in Belarus. Account number: 92 1020 4391 0000 6402 0114 0276.

The Global Children's Foundation (UK Reg. No 1118775) are helping me to raise funds and therefore donations



■ Fr Christopher with his parishioners

can also be made through them. This UK registered charity has helped CSMA orphanages in Poland since 2006.

1. Donate By Post

Please make cheques payable to **Global Children's Foundation** and send to: Global Children's Foundation – Belarus Project, PO Box 4332 Harlington Dunstable LU6 9DG United Kingdom. Receipt will follow by return of post.

2. Donate By BACS

Barclays Bank SORT CODE: 20-57-06 A/C NUMBER: 10469270 BRANCH: Barclays, Mile End Branch London UK NAME: GLOBAL CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION

3. Donate Online

Visit the GCF Just Giving site to make a one off, weekly or monthly donation. www.justgiving.com/globalchildrensfoundation/donate

Weekly Mass

I wish to thank Fr. Peter Prusakiewicz, the chief editor of The Angels magazine who has agreed to be a patron of this work. Since November 2011 each Tuesday (the day of St Michael the Archangel) I have fulfilled my promise to celebrate a Mass for all donors. With my gift of prayer and a grateful heart.

Father **Christopher Poświata** CSMA

Angel of God, my guardian dear...

We know these words from our earliest childhood. The most popular image of a Guardian Angel is one who takes care of children. St Thomas Aquinas attempts to explain the phenomenon.

Angels guard us

A young child needs protection the most. They are not able to take care of themselves and have no awareness of what is good for them but a parent has and helps and guides them. Does this mean that an all-knowing adult does not need angelic help each day?

It is the truth of faith that angels guard us in our life. It seems that angelic help and protection is included in Divine Providence over the world. One of the rules of Divine Providence is that *“in all things the movable and variable are moved and regulated by the immovable and invariable; as all corporeal things by immovable spiritual substances, and the inferior bodies by the superior which are invariable in substance.”* (STh, Question 113, Article 1)

St Thomas claims that immovable and invariable beings are more perfect than the movable ones. In other words, angels are more perfect than people. The answer is angels do not have bodies. Therefore, they do not have to satisfy their hunger or perform other activities to fulfil basic bodily needs such as sleep, movement, etc.

Angels are perfect beings

Divine Order consists of an influence of perfect beings (angels) on the imperfect ones (people) because the latter do not know how to live in the world. Therefore, people need to ask and count on angels for help and assistance. In the modern world of information overload people often do not know what to think of certain issues. Aquinas advises to follow the rules we consider invariable.

For instance, there are various opinions concerning the use of so called soft drugs. Some people state they are harmful and we should not touch them, whereas others feel that a bit of pleasure is relaxing and no cause for alarm or concern. Now, in order to know which opinion is acceptable we need to think of a general, invariable principle. The principle says that if a substance is destructive for our health, it cannot be good. It results from a much more general commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” So if we know that drugs are addictive and gradually destroy our health, we cannot believe in the opinion that they are harmless.



St Thomas claims that human beings may be inconstant and easily quit in choosing good according to the above principles. It results from imperfect human knowledge as well as our feelings which sometimes blur the simplest choice. Feelings often lead people towards pleasure. Then, they fail from doing good or making the right decision. Therefore, they need someone who would lead or guide them towards good; *“So it was necessary that angels should be deputed for the guardianship of men, in order to regulate them and move them to good.”* (STh, Question 113, Article 1)

Call on your guardian angel

One may say that a guardian angel is not needed for man and man is able to guard himself by his free will. Man knows how to do it by his natural knowledge and natural law. St Thomas answers that free will and natural law are insufficient to protect man from evil. Free will and decisions are often endangered by our feelings: we all experience situations in which we know what we should do but do the opposite for an easier life or to make someone else happy. Human knowledge is endangered by the difficulty to apply the general principles to everyday decisions. For instance, we do not realise that “Thou shalt not kill” refers not only to a murder but also to abortion, taking drugs or even smoking.

Our guardian angels always make use of various occasions to draw us to do good. They use each situation, each moment of our life to keep us on the Divine path. If we make a mistake or lose ourselves by going on the wrong path, they do their best to show us the right way. Angels are not guilty of us committing sin. It is our choice, our sin. We close ourselves to their inspirations, they are with us 24 hours a day. May we ask our guardian angels to help and guide us in all situations. May we open ourselves to them, they are waiting for us to call on them each day. They definitely find the solution and are the best way to protect us from evil and lead us to God.

Father **Tomasz Stepien** CSMA

The Power of Powerlessness

A young boy called John was bringing wood to burn on the fire. He overfilled the sack and found it hard to carry it back to the house from the forest. He started dragging the sack along the ground but it was still too difficult for him to handle. His father standing at the door observed his struggle.

He shouted: “John, use your full strength!”

John tried to pull harder but he was even more exhausted. He sat down on the ground reluctantly.

His Father repeated: “John, use all your strength.”

John shouted back: “But daddy, I am using my full strength!”

Then his father replied: “No you are not! You have not asked me to help you!”

John realised that he was trying to do it all on his own. It was obvious that the task was too much for him. Help was at hand but he did not ask. Was it that he just did not think of it? Or perhaps he was too proud to ask and show his weakness?

We may be similar to John in our relationship with God. Do we have confidence to ask for help when we need it? Or are we too proud? Or do we just forget to ask for help? Whatever the answer is, we may not be using our full strength. God, who made us, also wants to help us. The only thing we have to do is ask! As Scripture says: “Ask and you will

receive, knock and the door will be opened to you.”

“When I am weak then I am strong”

St Paul wrote: “When I am weak then I am strong.” I am strong because when I ask God, He fills my heart and my life with His strength. I would like you to consider what it means to be weak in order to experience God’s strength in practice.

God is rich. He is rich in His mercy and rich in His omnipotence. He wants to share mercy and power with us. He wants to make us strong. When we apply to His mercy we apply to His omnipotence at the same time. Mercy and power go together, hand in hand. Experiencing our own weakness opens us to God’s grace and power.

First of all, each one of us has to admit that we are weak. But how can we discover this truth about ourselves? We should look at ourselves as God’s creatures. We are limited. We can exercise our body but in fact it is weak. Our body is lowly in that it is wearing out. Our bodily strength gradually begins to fail, our mental powers wane, our eyesight fails and we often experience humiliating illness.

Apart from physical weakness we are also spiritually weak. Satan is stronger than we are unless we are

filled with God's grace and power. We tend to give into temptation very easily particularly when we rely on ourselves. That is why we fail.

Everyone wants to be perfect. But that is impossible. Everyone is a sinner after the original sin of Adam and Eve. That is why we cry out for God's mercy. When we have sinned we feel weak, spiritually weak. Each sin weakens us. In addition, we do not know how to get rid of our sins. People can either hide them inside of themselves or forget about them. But this is not a solution. They will still be within us. We may go to an analyst and confess them. But this will not bring any results either because specialists are unable to give us absolution. We will still be spiritually ill. The only genuine hope and solution is called Jesus Christ. He comes to meet our weaknesses which have resulted from the burden of sin. Christ has already paid the ransom for the sins we have committed and will be committing till the end of our lives. He is the only Saviour. We cannot be saved from our sins by doctors, psychologists or therapists. "Only in Him is there salvation; for of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved" (Acts 4,12). The name is Jesus. The only saviour is called Jesus Christ, Incarnate Mercy.

Complete misery

That is why we have to admit that our weakness prompts us to go to God and opens us to His power and mercy. In what way does the topic refer to the life of St Sister Faustina?

Firstly, let us notice that she experienced her weaknesses in her life often. She described it in her Diary:

"I am very weak, and I attribute everything solely to the grace of God." (Diary 1086)

"Without you, I am weakness itself. What am I without Your grace if not an abyss of my own misery. Misery is my possession." (Diary 1630)

"I do not forget that I am weakness itself, though I do not doubt even for a moment that I will obtain Your Grace, O God." (Diary 1344)

"Although my weakness is great, I trust in the power of Your Grace, which will sustain me." (Diary 1371)

"Even though that I am weakness itself, nevertheless, with you I can do all things." (Diary 954)

"With your grace one can do all things." (Diary 1620)

St Faustina was not terrified by her weaknesses because Jesus assured her: "You see what you are of yourself, but do not be frightened at this." (Diary 718) She wrote: "One day during Holy Mass, the Lord gave me a deeper knowledge of His holiness and His majesty, and at the same time I saw my own misery. This knowledge made me happy, and my soul drowned itself completely in His mercy. I felt enormously happy." (Diary 1801)

Our weakness makes room for God in our life. That is why sometimes people turn to God when they experience physical illness, depression or spiritual problems. Such helplessness made Sister Faustina turn to God for help and strength. In fact, her weaknesses strengthened her relationship with Jesus. It brought her to total dependence on Him, to trust in Him more and more. One day Jesus said to St Faustina: "If it were not for this imperfection you would not have come to me."

What did she usually do when in weakness? She prayed. Her weaknesses somehow compelled Jesus to be with her. Let me cite some of her prayers taken from the Diary: "O Jesus my dearest Master, do not abandon me not even for a moment. Jesus,

you know that it is my weakness that forces You to be with me constantly." (569) "May Your Grace, which flows down upon me strengthen me for the struggle and suffering, that I remain faithful to You and although I am in such misery, I do not fear You, because I know Your mercy well." (1803) "Jesus source of life, sanctify me. O my strength, fortify me. My Commander, fight for me. Only light of my soul, enlighten me. My master, guide me. I entrust myself to You as a little child does to its mother's love." (1490)

"Pajdija" means "children"

What does it mean to be weak according to St Faustina? It somehow relates to having a childlike attitude towards God. In St John's Gospel we find words which seem very strange. Jesus is saying to the Apostles: "Have not you caught anything friends?" (J 21:5). But in other versions it sounds differently: "Children do you have something to eat?" Also in the original text the Greek word 'pajdija', that is, children, is used.

What is more, during the Last Supper Jesus called the Apostles "little children". That word **children** seems to be strange when it refers to adult mature men. Why did He do so? Probably He wanted to express His care for them. He presented Himself as God who not only saves us from every evil, but also who feeds us. It shows His familiar care for man. He asks us: **My child are you hungry? My child are you tired or ill? My child would not you like to go to bed earlier?**

But the word 'child' has also an important meaning in the devotion of the Divine Mercy. Jesus often



■ Sister Faustina (Helena Kowalska) before she entered the convent

called Sister Faustina “His child”. What does it mean to be like a child before God? What does this attitude consist of? In what way can we reach such a childlike attitude?

Let me answer these questions in a few points.

Firstly, being like a child before God means to acknowledge one’s own nothingness and to await everything from God. A little child in its helplessness depends totally on its mother and father. The child loves and trusts them without limit. God makes us weak, since it leads us to reach out to the Lord and attracts

God’s omnipotence and above all, to attract His great mercy. However, recognition, acceptance and love of our weakness does not mean justification of our sins; instead, it helps us remain in the truth about ourselves. This is essential. Awareness of our wretchedness is the case when we call God’s power and mercy.

A child’s helplessness obliges God to manifest His love. The acknowledgement of our own nothingness without faith in God’s love leads to sadness, discouragement and even to despair. A child finds hope in God’s love and unfathomable mercy.

God bestows on us countless gifts, but if we fail to perceive these gifts, this is down to the sin of pride. That is why there is so little gratitude towards God. A child is grateful. He knows that God is his Father. Therefore, he confidently throws himself into the arms of his heavenly Father. A child knows that the Father always gives him what is best for him.

Secondly, a childlike trust in God means not to accumulate unnecessary reserves. A child is totally dependent on God and relies on His providence. This does not mean that we should not acquire the necessary means to live, but we should not justify laziness or the lack of prudence by saying: “God is my Father. He will take care of me.” No! We have to do our best. The “evangelical child” does not accumulate reserves of spiritual goods such as: prayer, religious knowledge or good deeds. Similarly, he does not rely on wealth or religious experience. We have received everything as a gift from God, even when we have co-operated with Him to some extent.

Thirdly, to be like a child is not to attribute one’s virtues to oneself because it is God who puts them into our hands. To those who notice his virtues he says with simplicity: “It is not me, but God who accomplishes everything.” A child knows that all his strength comes from God because Jesus said: “For, cut off from me, you can do nothing” (J 15:5) Often we pride ourselves on our own greatness. We forget that the sole creator and giver of everything is God.

Fourthly, to remain a child before God means not to be discouraged by one’s failings. A child falls many times but he gets up straight away to walk through life with new hope.

He is aware of his helplessness and lack of strength. He reaches out his hands to his heavenly Father after each fall. His falls are not too painful thanks to his smallness. After each infidelity a child runs to his parents and tells them everything he has done, believing that they will not reject him. In practice a childlike trust in God means turning with trust towards God after each sin. It means admitting his guilt and confessing unshakeable childlike faith in God's love.

I commune with the little

Let us move onto Sister Faustina. Her life reflected this kind of spirituality in which she was similar to St Therese of Lisieux. Initially she asked Jesus for such an attitude in her heart: "O how much I desire to be a small child. You are my Father, and you know how little and weak I am." (**Diary 242**) "And I rejoice immensely in His greatness and am delighted that I am so little because, since I am little, He carries me in His arms and holds me close to His Heart." (**Diary 779**)

Her development in spiritual childhood started in the novitiate. She felt as if she was rejected by God. She could not understand what was going on inside her. Therefore, she turned to the Heavenly Father to ask for his help. Also, her spiritual director advised her to trust God as a little child does: "Sister, let simplicity and humility be the characteristic traits of your soul. Go through life like a little child, always trusting, always full of simplicity and humility, content with everything, happy in all circumstances." (**Diary 255**)



Jesus said to her: "I will be with you always, if you always remain a little child and fear nothing." (**Diary 295**) And in another passage Christ replied: "Although My greatness is beyond understanding, I commune only with those who are little. I demand of you a childlike spirit." (**Diary 332**) God let her experience that she was a child loved by God the Father. She confessed: "I felt that I was

inundated with Divine light. Since then, my soul has been in intimate communion with God, like a child with its beloved father." (**Diary 27**)

Jesus helped her to welcome the gift of the spiritual childhood by many visions in which He called her "his child or daughter". He encouraged her to trust in God and assured her that God the Father was always with her even when she suffered and

felt lonely. She wrote: “Then Jesus said to me: My daughter, fear nothing. I am always with you, even if it seems to you that I am not. Your humility draws Me down from My lofty throne, and I unite myself closely with you.” (Diary 1109)

St Faustina answered to this invitation to be like a child in front of God in many ways.

She entrusted to her heavenly Father all her worries, joys and problems. She experienced her simplicity and weakness: “God is my Father and so I, his child, have every claim to His divine Heart, and the greater the darkness, the more complete our trust should be” (Diary 357). “I know that God is always the best of Fathers and makes little of human opinion. It follows faithfully the faintest breath of the Holy Spirit; it rejoices in this spiritual Guest and holds onto Him like a child to its mother.” (Diary 148)

Sister Faustina felt safe in the presence of the Father and knew that thanks to His power she could safely walk over precipices. She wrote: “Close to your heart I feel nothing. In these dangerous moments, I act like a little child, carried in its mother’s arms, when it sees something which menaces it, it clasps its mother neck more firmly and feels secure.” (Diary 1726) Her spiritual childhood expressed itself in trust, obedience, humility and simplicity.

We may renew our sense of being God’s child when we say the “Our Father” prayer. Also, we may often repeat the calling “Father I trust in you.” From “Jesus I trust in you” we move on to “Father I trust in you.”

Father **Peter Prusakiewicz** CSMA

What if children did not know how to pray to their guardian angel because they were too young, or probably did not know they had one etc?

Angels always help us. We can count on them as they are loyal friends. In each Mass priests and the faithful pray for the whole Church including children. The youngest have strong need to contact angels. They eagerly and naturally accept the world of invisible pure beings. They like the popular prayer “Angel of God, my guardian dear”. However, if children do not know anything about angels, it cannot be said that angelic protection is “less effective”. We may compare it to a situation in the adult world: our friends naturally help without asking. Angels help those who do not know them without asking. That is what friends do. But if we request them, they are much happier to give us a hand.

The question that keeps coming up is that if each person has a guardian angel or patron saint, how can one explain the bad things that happen to people, especially to young children?

The main task of guardian angels is to lead us to our Heavenly Father. They are our spiritual carers and their help refers to our spiritual life primarily. We also pray to them to protect us from any earthly dangers.

The Bible also mentions angelic help: “They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone.” (Psalm 91) However, there is a strange situation in the Bible; Jesus was going to be arrested. Although He was innocent, He would suffer and die. Jesus knew that God could have saved Him: “Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, who would promptly send more than twelve legions of angels to my defence?” (Mt 26:53)

God may let spiritual and physical evil acts happen to us. We do not know why some people suffer whereas others seem to be fine. It is a mystery. God draws good from greatest evil. The innocent and children’s suffering appears incomprehensible for us. We even have a grudge against God and ask: Where are You, Lord? Where are you, guardian angels? Why do you not do something? However, when we are in Heaven we will look at those evil acts and we will realise that they occurred for the greater good.

Why did their guardian angel let any harm happen to the innocent? Where is their guardian angel and its protection for them? What is the function of a guardian angel in such instances?

We shall not accuse guardian angels of allowing evil. God presents people with free will. That is what love is about. Love includes freedom. People are responsible for each evil act or good act done upon other person.

Guardian angels assist those who suffer. God is also with them. Once,

a child was hanged on a hook in the concentration camp in Oswiecim, Poland. Someone started screaming: "People, do something! Where is God?!" Another prisoner replied: "Stop yelling. God is within this kid." God was also hanged on the cross, He also suffered and was killed. Guardian angels help us accept painful ordeals in our life.

There is no answer on the question "Why suffering?" It is a mystery. Human beings never understand suffering to its very core because it is impossible to understand this mystery. Through faith we believe that suffering is sensible. If mice knew that thanks to experiments on them many people lived longer, they would definitely see the sense of suffering.

Jesus Christ redeemed the world through suffering. He let us experience suffering for our greater good. Our question "Why suffering?" meets with Jesus' answer "I bear your fate." In difficult situations we may scream: "God, why have you abandoned

me? Why have You forsaken me? Guardian angel, do something!" But eventually we will say: "Thy will be done" because we realise that God and the guardian angels are always by our side.

Was the guardian angel blocked from helping them for a reason, if so by whom – by Satan, by God? If by Satan what does this mean about the power of angels?

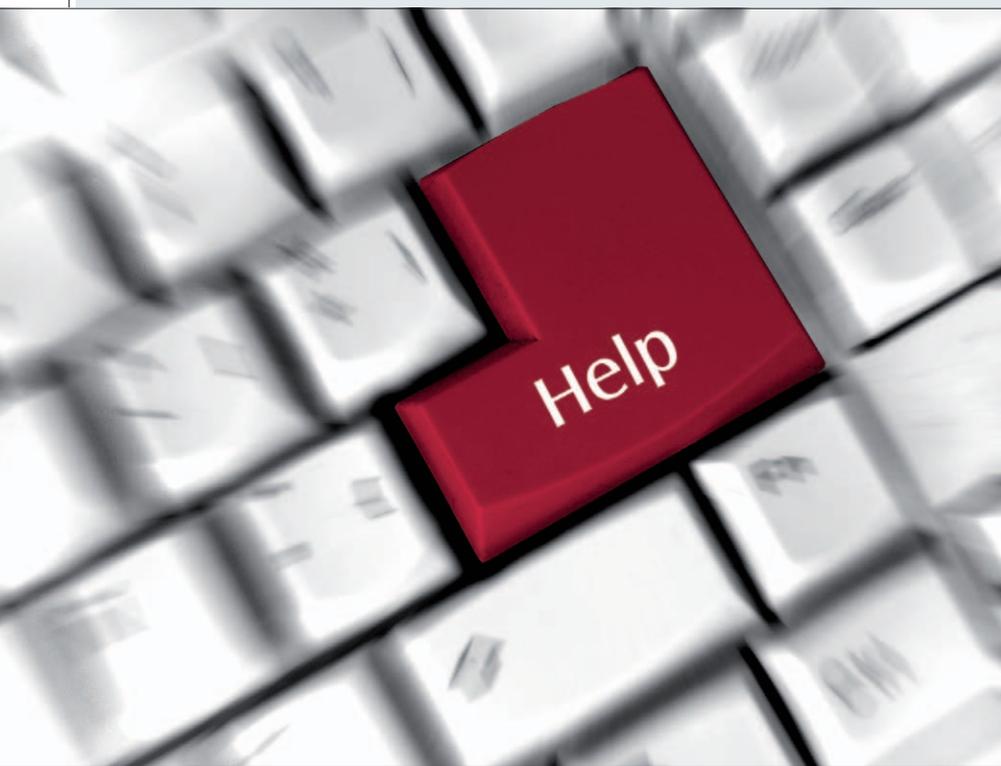
God never blocks angels in making good. Angels are controlled by the Holy Spirit who is the chief of staff where angels are His subordinates. The Holy Spirit may perform a task by Himself or send one of His workers to inspire us to good. Satan also cannot block angels in any way. Angels are united with God; therefore, they

are stronger than the devil. The truth is included in the prayer to St Michael the Archangels, in which we say: "O Prince of the Divine Power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits." St Michael and other angels have the power to defeat Satan. However, angels may be blocked by our free will. Each angel as well as God is a gentleman. St Hilary compared the guardian angel to a tutor who inspired, encouraged, taught but did not perform a task his pupil was supposed to do.

Do guardian angels only work for adults; for Christian people only; what about Muslims, Jewish people, those from other religions, what about agnostics or atheists?

The Bible says that each person has got their own guardian angel. There is no division into religions or nations. The Desert Fathers taught that angels helped the baptized and non-baptized in different ways. Angelic help is tailored to a person. Each of us is unique and the same is with angels: they are as inimitable as fingerprints or the iris of an eye. Their help and protection is different for each person. We can be sure of angelic help. However, we should also remember that they may be limited by our will. Even if we reject angels, they never abandon us. They respect our free will: they are happy with our spiritual development and cry when we commit sins. They are both our trainers and fans.

Father **Peter Prusakiewicz** CSMA



Holy Messengers and Comforters

It is by no mistake that God created an army, a multitude of celestial beings to serve him before he created man. From the very beginning they have served him and been his envoys.

Did not an angel stand guard over the Tree of Life, after Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge? They protect all that is of God and defend his honour and glory. They are completely submitted to His will. Each angel is utterly distinct and unique in form from any other, which too is a wonder of God's creativity. The word angel means messenger, a bearer of news, and announcer. How often do they 'whisper' in the depth of our spirit 'news' of protection or warning, often unheeded and unrecognised as such? How they reveal themselves to us is also different but they do so much more often than we realise.

Many apparitions of Our Mother Mary have been preceded by the appearance of an angel announcing what is about to happen. The Angel of Fatima not only came but prepared the three children for Our Lady's coming, teaching and instructing (the Fatima prayer on the Eucharist). In Akita Japan, the angel led Sister Agnes to the chapel as it did St Catherine Laboure before Our Lady came to give the 'Miraculous Medal' to her. He came to announce her appearance



and led the saintly Catherine to the altar from her dormitory - appearing first as a little child "with rays of light coming from him". He said to her "Come with me to the chapel, the Blessed Virgin awaits you". She

was astonished when at a touch of the child's finger the heavy chapel door swung open. When Our Lady appeared and not knowing how to behave the 'child' spoke again "it is the Blessed Virgin", then the child's voice

changed and took on the deeper tone of a man's voice, again repeating who she was seeing. She later realised that it was her guardian angel.

Informers, teachers, guides

Angels are announcers, informers, teachers, guides and they communicate to us God's will for us in any number of situations. Reflecting on perhaps the greatest 'Good News' of Our Lady's motherhood, the wondrous announcement of all time, I realised that there are many other instances in the Old and New Testament of the imparting of information which, had it not been heeded, would have brought about misfortune or tragedy. This was not information given but transmitted to protect and illuminate, and which also carried a degree of command.

The words of angels carry great authority because they are the mouthpieces of God. They act only on the authority and will of the Trinity. Totally obedient they are sent to help us carry out the wishes of God. We are familiar with the word of the Angel Gabriel to Mary - "Do not be afraid" and the statement of her conception, but how familiar are we with the many times that this request is made with the following 'command' (which of course can be rejected as we have free will, though it would be foolishness itself) GO!....

These words reach through the centuries in the Bible and are often critical in the events that follow. Lot was told to "go quick take your wife and two daughters and get out of the city," to lead them out. The city was about to be destroyed. That city was Sodom (Gen 19.vvs 12-21.)

Hagar the slave girl of Abraham was being sent away with her son Ishmael at both the Lord's and Sarah's request. Frightened and fearing for her son's life an angel spoke to her thus: "What are you troubled about Hagar? Do not be afraid. God has heard the boy crying. Get up and go and pick him up and comfort him." He told her that God "will make him a great nation out of his descendants."

Obedience

Sometimes news is conveyed in an unusual way as is the case of Balaam and the Donkey. The donkey in this instance was more obedient than its owner and had responded when an angel bade him to stop. This happened three times and each time he was beaten by Balaam. Finally the angel appears to Balaam and explains what the donkey 'understood', explaining that he was not to continue his journey. Balaam relents and is sorry but the angel then tells him that he can 'go' and continue the journey but only if he speaks the word that the angel gives him. (Nu 22.2-28). This is an interesting lesson in obedience.

Then there is Elijah, who is frightened and fearful for his life (1 Kings 19 5-7), and is hiding in the Desert. He is strengthened and fortified through an angel. "Get up and eat" he tells him. Then he tells him to do it again with these words "get up and eat or the journey will be too much for you". Elijah does so and gained strength for forty days. The angel not only comforted him but brought him courage.

King David too was ordered by an angel, through Gad to "go and build an altar to the Lord at Araunah's

threshing place and to put away his sword". Again through an intermediary Zechariah was instructed to tell Zerubbabel that he would succeed in rebuilding the Temple not by military might, nor his own strength but by the Spirit. Sometimes the angelic message is given through a prophet. (Zech. 4 6-8)

Do not be afraid

If we turn to the New Testament we can see even more clearly that the words "Go" and "Do not be afraid" go hand in hand and so does a request for action. Before the Annunciation these become manifest in an angel's words to Zechariah. St John's birth too was heralded by the word of the angel to the doubting husband of Elizabeth. While at prayer the angel appeared to him and said.... "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, God has heard your prayer and your wife will bear you a son and you will name him John." Feeling that they were both too old, his doubt cost him his speech until he did as the angel bid and named him.

The Angel Gabriel reassures Our Lady lovingly, not to be afraid but how comforting must have been the words to St Joseph: "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife," words to reassure and yet to guide. (Matt 1. 18-24) Again when they were all in danger, "So get up and take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt." Joseph obeyed and they were safe (Matt 2 13-14).

Indeed there are many references in Matthew's Gospel that instruct, gather and sort things out at the end of time. Perhaps one of the most clear of all the greetings was to Mary Magdalene - "You must not be afraid - go quickly and tell the disciples he has risen from death.



Remember what I have told you.” (Matt 28. 5) How amazed she must have been, yet she obeyed and did exactly as she was told.

This special way of communicating God’s will by reminding us not to be afraid and then acting on the messenger’s words is also clearly seen after the death and rising of Jesus. The angels stayed with the apostles and disciples as they do with us. There are many examples but some are especially graphic. The imprisoned apostles are led out of the prison by an angel and told to “Go and stand in the Temple and tell the people all about this new life” (Acts 5- 19). Surely, an incredible act requiring much courage.

Philip is told to “Get ready and go to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza,” he had to meet the Eunuch from Ethiopia and instruct him; a highly individual instruction to both.

Then to a non-Jew, Cornelius, an angel appears as a man and he, without doubting, responds “What is it

Sir?” - what a faith filled response - the angel continues “Send two men to Joppa to Simon Peter...” he did so and another chapter opens up for the Gentiles and St Peter is taught to welcome all to the Lord’s table.

How glad St Paul must have been when in danger of shipwreck enroute to Crete to hear these words, “Do not be afraid - you must stand before the Emperor,” and that all would be spared drowning (Acts 27 - 23).

Help us have courage

It is clear that the Lord’s emissaries convey that deep trust in the Lord’s will. They help us have courage in the face of doubt, confusion, and adversity. They also make the path clear so that we can carry out God’s will for us - our own guardians too fulfil this role if we let them.

How often do they whisper in our ears, “Do not be afraid” and steer us in the right way of rejecting wrongdoing and helping us chose the better part? If afraid we can always ask for their guidance. Maybe too, sometimes in extraordinary ways, angels have safeguarded us.

We should not be afraid to own this and witness to it. We are all part of God’s creation and all things work for His glory.

*Praise the Lord you strong
and mighty Angels
Who obey His Commands
Who listen to what He says
Praise the Lord you heavenly powers
You servants of His who do His will.
Praise the Lord all His creation
In all places He rules
Praise the Lord my soul.*

Psalm 103

Halina Holman

County Durham, England
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Assumption of the Mother of God

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) seems to be the symbol of the Baroque style of painting. No one was left untouched by his art. The artist was praised for his technical virtuosity and mastery of colour. At the same time he was rebuked for his lack of moderation and the explosion of corporeality. The beauty of his figures was mocked. And yet, his paintings speak for themselves: they pulsate with energy, of brush traces and a sophisticated harmony of colours. His invention and freedom in creating spectacular performances in the painting appears amazing. Ancient Greek and Roman mythology is mixed with Christianity or with history contemporary to Rubens. He had the courage to transpose light and colour on to the images he portrays...

In the cathedral of Antwerp there are several works by Rubens, among which there is also "The Assumption of Mary". The painting – oil on canvas 490x325 cm, painted in 1626 - is situated on the main altar. The dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God was proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in 1950. Although, there is no mention of her death in the Scriptures, Mary's death has been connected with the Assumption since the early centuries of Christianity.

This theme has been popular in art since the early medieval times. The sources of interest about the Assumption were the apocryphal books, the homilies or the Golden Legend by Jacob de Voragine from the 13th century. Those works depicted the Blessed Virgin Mary taken up to heaven on the model of the Ascension of Christ. She was to be like Her Son and exalted over all creation. In modern times the Reformation questioned such a conviction, but after the Council of

Trent the theme of Mary's glorification as the symbol of the Church became very popular in both easel and wall painting.

Rubens made several paintings referring to the Assumption. The most mature version is the one at Antwerp which presents a great figure of Mary lifted by angels to Heaven and the Apostles gathered around the tomb. Angels are very significant participants of this event. They are assisting Mary's triumphal Assumption as well as holding her image in a medallion, an oval mandorla.

There are three groups of angels in the painting: little boys with wings (*putti*), heads with wings only and men in ancient robes. They were well-known and most admired by artists of the Baroque and Rococo style. The angels have various functions, the naked cupids tangled in Mary's robe are helping the Mother of God ascend to heaven but seem ineffective by an invisible gust of wind. From the 13th

century ancient Cupids were used as childish angels in Christian art. Their prototype is of ancient Eros Psychophoros, the guardian of the deceased, who transfers a soul to the kingdom of death. Heavenly messengers also take part in the Assumption in the picture.

A group of four angels with feminine faces and naked chests are holding a garland of roses (the symbol of victory) and a palm (the symbol of eternal life). These come from ancient Victorias carved on sacrophaguses. Rubens depicted them as angelic witnesses of Mary's triumph and immortality. The chubby heads among the clouds are cousins of cherubs by Pseudo-Dionisus stylized on ancient ones according to the Renaissance convention. They appear rather more as decorations than helpers.

These Heavenly spirits are of less interest in modern times. Rubens' angels are painted on the Renaissance model, that is, they are less mysterious and more human



scene by Rubens is sunk deeply in an earthly atmosphere. It is divided into two zones: an earthly one and a heavenly one. Even the heaven appears to be “human” or “more earthly” to where angels descend in order to lead Mary to meet God. The picture has a rectangular shape with a semi-circular arc at the top. Above the scene Mary is surrounded by angels. At the bottom, there is a stone sarcophagus decorated with an ancient ornament. The humbled Apostles and women wearing Renaissance dresses are standing around the tomb. Several of them are looking inside the empty sarcophagus, while others with total surprise adore the abandoned shroud or Mary going to heaven. Women who are known from apocryphal books, act as counterweights to the patriarchal world of the Apostles. Mary and the women represent the feminine aspect of the created world which is as equally important as the male aspect. Rubens’ vision unites these opposites.

The affirmation of life triumphing over death is emphasized by the warm vivid colours in many shades as well as the harmony between red and blue. Sacred light from the top accents the upper group of Mary and the angels and falls on the white shroud. The soft dynamic shapes are grasped in consistent and logical composition based on the oval and triangle. Joshua Reynolds, a portrait painter of the 18th century, compared Rubens’ colour effect to a bouquet of flowers. The Assumption by Rubens is one of numerous bouquets painted by the sophisticated colourist and the songster of the sensory beauty of life.

Zaneta Groborz-Mazanek

like. Spirituality is replaced by corporeality, as well as the sacred is changed into the profane. This radiant and bright work by Rubens sparkles with dynamism and with vital energy. It praises the world of the senses. But paradoxically, does it not correspond to the Assumption? Acceptance of the fact of assumption is also an acceptance of the human body as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The human body becomes worthy of sanctification and of transfiguration by God. Mary’s Assumption seems to be the harbinger for resurrection, change and the eternal life of man.

The image is set on the Counter-Reformation convention and depicts the triumph of the Church personified by the Mother of God. Echoes of Titian’s Assumption may be recognized in the picture. However, the



The Phenomenon of Guadeloupe

(Part 3)

Indian mantle that has survived 480 years

Probably the very first question researchers would like to find the answer to is: how is it possible that an Indian mantle made of agave fibres with an average lifespan of forty years has survived for 480 years? This is the first research carried out scientifically on the unexplained phenomenon of the Guadeloupe image.

Another question raised refers to the way in which the miraculous image appeared on the mantle.

Researchers of various disciplines (art historians, chemists, geologists and others) have stated that the image could not have been made by a human being. The restorers who had examined the mantle with infrared did not find traces of a brush being used. After analyzing the dyes on the mantle, chemists found the dyes did not exist on earth because they were neither of vegetable, animal nor of mineral origin. Painters claimed they did not know the painting technique used to create the image. No visible traces were apparent of sketches on the image, including that on Our Lady's face, which is contrary to classic iconography. The image also shows there is a natural phenomenon

called diffraction, this optical effect shows Our Lady's complexion as olive from a distance whereas if you look closer it appears white.

Mantle did not disintegrate

Research also proved that the fabric was not saturated with any substance to prevent its decay. And yet, the image has been repeatedly exposed to harmful elements and has not disintegrated. There is no residue of candle smoke, nor traces of dirt from the fingers of the faithful, who constantly touched the image.

A bomb explosion in the Basilica destroyed everything apart from the miraculous image. In 1971, a specialist cleaning of the silver frame accidentally spilt caustic nitric acid onto the image. The fabric should have been destroyed; instead, only a small stain remained.

Another question concerns the eyes of Mary. In 1929, Antonio Gonzales, the photographer, enlarged the image by a traditional photographic method. He discovered a figure of a man in Our Lady's pupil. On the basis of contemporary iconography the man was identified as Juan Diego. In 1955, Louis Marie Martinez, the bishop of Mexico City, called a panel of experts, who confirmed Gonzales' discovery. Nevertheless, it was just a beginning of extraordinary discoveries referring to the eyes of Our Lady of Guadeloupe

The mystery of the pupil

The next team of researchers, including Javier Torroelo Buene and Rafael Torifa Lavoignet, discovered that the asymmetrical and distorted reflection of the figure in Our Lady's eyes was the same as in an eye of a human being. In 1963, the board of Kodak in Mexico City announced that "the holy image is of a photographic character." How is that possible? Digital photography is the invention of the twentieth century!

Buene and Lavoignet examined the bottom of the eye and the pupils of Our Lady of Guadeloupe with an ophthalmoscope. They found that the reflection in Her pupils was like that found in human pupils. That was why the image seemed alive. In 1962

another researcher, Doctor Charles Wahlig, made a 25-fold enlargement of Mary's pupils and noticed two more figures. It was Juan Zumarraga, the bishop of Mexico City and his interpreter Juan Gonzales. Juan Diego unfolded his mantle in the presence of those two men. At that time painters could not have created so many details by the means of contemporary painting techniques. The mystery of the pupils of Our Lady of Guadeloupe remains unexplained.

Saint of pro-life

Our Lady's robe seems another amazing mystery. In the 1980's Father Mario Sanchez Rojas and Doctor Juan Homero Hernando Illescas noticed that the astral constellation seen on the robe was in the same order as it was in the day of Our Lady's apparition on 12 December, 1531. Moreover, the directions of the world were reversed, which suggests that the constellation was seen from heaven rather than from earth.

Our Lady of Guadeloupe attempts to pass a significant message on through the miraculous image. On 24 April 2007, the Council of Mexico City was about to legalize abortion on demand. That day the faithful who gathered in the Basilica noticed that the image began to blur. Then, the bright light of a child-shape appeared in Our Lady's womb. Photographic analysis excluded the possibility of any manipulation of light from the outside.

Let us remember that Our Lady of Guadeloupe is pregnant. Indians recognized her pregnancy in the symbol of the flower of the sun on Her robe. That is why She is the patron saint of pro-life movements defending the unborn.



The image of Our Lady of Guadeloupe in abortion clinics in the United States was accompanied by the tears of converted mothers. One could hear the beating of two hearts – Mother and Child's – by the stethoscope put on Our Lady's womb in the image. At times tears of oil were seen dripping down Her face.

Although the mantle was thoroughly examined many times, the miraculous image still remains a mystery. It fascinates and attracts us all the time. Its message is full of hope: "I am your Merciful Mother. I am a Mother of yours and all those who love me and look for me and trust me."

Our Lady encourages us: "I am your Mother and I am here for you. You are under my protection. I am the source of your joy and you are shrouded in my robe and in my hands. Do you need anything more?"

Let us entrust ourselves to Our Lady, it is She who will lead us to Her Son.

Ewelina Szczesniak, Poland

VIRTUES

(Part 5)

The virtues represent unshaken fortitude in the cause of God.

The second order of angels is composed of the Choirs of the Dominations, Powers and Virtues. This order of angels is

charged with governing and ordering the laws of the created universe.

“Virtues” or “Strongholds” lie beyond the *ophanim* (Thrones/Wheels). Their primary duty is to supervise the movements of the heavenly bodies in order to ensure that the cosmos remains in order. The term appears to be linked to the attribute “might”, from the Greek root “*δύναμις*” in Ephesians 1:21, which is also translated as “virtue”. They are presented as the celestial Choir “virtues”, in the *Summa Theologica*. Virtues represent unshaken fortitude in the cause of God.

Miracles, grace and fortitude

Virtues are associated with grace and bestow blessings from the heavens. Known as the Spirits of Motion and control of the elements, they are sometimes referred to as “the shining ones.” All of nature is subject to their control, the seasons, stars, moon; even the sun is subject to their command. Virtues are the instruments through which God works his miracles.

The name of the holy virtues signifies a certain powerful and amazing fortitude welling forth into all their Godlike strength; not being weak and feeble for any reception of the divine illuminations granted to it; mounting upwards in fullness of power to an assimilation with God; never falling away from the Divine Life through its own weakness, but ascending

unwaveringly to the Source of virtue. This unshaken fortitude is the characteristic of all who work miracles in God’s name.

Virtue is used in the Word of God to describe the miraculous power within Jesus Christ... “And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed [them] all” (Lu 6:17-19 AV).

Courage

Virtues provide courage, grace, valour, heroic deeds and we may go to them and ask for aid in the struggle for good against evil. We should invoke them in unforeseen accidents, in sickness etc.

Virtues have the task of dispensing the graces of God, which make difficult things easy. If we are to do great things for God, we should ask them for help often.

We are warned not to get caught worshipping or serving the sun, moon, stars, or the host of heavens (angels), which the LORD GOD has not commanded (Deuteronomy 17:3-5; Deuteronomy 4:19). We must worship only God.

Noreen Bavister, UK





Brief introduction to the Nine Choirs of Angels

1. Seraphim

The Seraphim is said to be the highest order of angels who guard God's throne. They are often depicted as 'burning angels' to represent them on fire with love for God. In the Bible Isaiah saw them as six winged beings. These heavenly creatures praise God.

2. Cherubim

The word Cherubim is said to mean 'fullness of knowledge'. The Cherubim have the honour of observing and keeping the records of God's creative powers. Cherubims are said to have four wings and four faces. The Cherubims also act as heavenly counselors and are the seekers of the eternal truth.

3. Thrones

Throne Angels represent the divine majesty and are associated with the power of judgement. They carry out God's justice according to spiritual and universal laws. The Thrones also act as angels who are friends of all the planets. It is the Thrones who will drive forward God's chariot, often they are portrayed as angels who carry the scales of justice.

4. Dominions

The Dominions are angels of leadership and are said to ensure that God's will is carried out by other angels. They help balance the force of creation and of the material and spiritual worlds. The Dominions represent the superiority of wisdom over intellect and govern the natural world and the elements.

5. Virtues

Virtues are known as angels who watch over the heavenly bodies and nature. The Virtues are often associated with miracles performed on earth. Shining bright and often depicted with swords, shields or sceptres, these wonderful angels will assist you in your darkest hour.

6. Powers

Powers are warrior angels who maintain order around planet earth and protect it from being overthrown by Satan, defending the cosmos and human souls. They fight against evil spirits who attempt to wreak chaos through human beings.

7. Principalities

The Principalities are a realm of angels who keep a watchful eye of the nations

of planet earth and its leaders. They are protectors of religion, giving strength in times of hardship.

8. Archangels

The Archangels are the most frequently mentioned throughout the Bible. They are the leaders of the angelic armies and are Holy messengers of God. There are only three archangels acknowledged by the Catholic Faith, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. They also command God's armies and act as guardian angels to leaders of world movements. They may be of this or other hierarchies like St Michael the Archangel.

9. Angels

These include guardian angels who are assigned by God to every human being at the moment of conception. Angels are closest to the material world and human beings. They deliver our prayers to God and return with God's answers. Guardian angels have the capacity to access all other angels at any time, their role is to watch over us during our lives. They are also the most caring and social of beings who assist those who ask for help.

Make room for God

I had been anticlerical, rebelled against God and the Church since my adolescence. I considered priests the worst enemies. And then, God called me.

I cohabited with a man for a couple of months. Money and career were my idols. However, something started to change in my life in 2004.

Shocking dream

I had dreams which were extremely different from my prevailing lifestyle. I saw a huge luminous angel helping me fight a demon. The only priest I trusted explained that it could have been St Michael the Archangel. He did not say a word more, maybe because he wished to

stimulate my interest. During my fervent search on the Internet I came across the website of the Sanctuary of St Michael in Mont Sant' Angelo, Italy. The Michaelites invited everyone to celebrate "The Angel Night" and I felt like going there to see the Italian customs. My parents also liked to go for the journey.

Demanding pledge

When participating in the celebration and looking at the figure of the Archangel, deeply in my soul I heard a voice calling me for a confession.

It took me an hour and a half to say all my sins for I had not confessed since my confirmation. Because I still lived with my lover a priest could not give me absolution. Unless... I make a pledge to stop having sex with my partner. A part of me was not convinced to such a solution but the other part longed for Holy Communion in the grotto so I made a decision. The confessor said at the end: "*Do not worry! You will see that you will be a new person tomorrow.*" Although I was an atheist, I went in front of the Blessed Sacrament to say a rosary. I did not know it well so my prayer was rather careless and unordered.



■ The grotto of apparitions of St Michael the Archangel in Monte Sant' Angelo, Italy



colleagues were atheists, a boss never accepted my conversion. In over thirty days I abandoned everything which could be an obstacle for Divine Love in my heart. In October 2005, I started studying theology. A year later I made a private vow in the presence of my spiritual guide Fr Riccardo Alessandrini. St Michael the Archangel was always at my side: 8th May 2005 I received a gift of conversion; 9th May 2010 I took holy orders in La Spezia.

Silver statue

There were many events connected with St Michael in my life. When I was a little girl my mum and I went to a flea market. I was delighted with a small silver figure I saw among lots of pieces of junk. Having seen my fascination my mum just bought it for me. The statue rested peacefully at the bottom of a drawer for years. When I looked at it after such a long time I realized it was St Michael of Gargano!

God heals me physically and spiritually. I experience a great care of the Prince of Heavenly Hosts who reminds me "Who is like God!" everyday. I feel Divine Love every day and every night. I know that I am like a small glass under a waterfall of grace. May Jesus Christ be blessed!

Looking at my past I realize that God tried to draw my attention in various ways but he always respected my freedom. Fortunately, He seduced me with His Love in May 2005. He did it in such a way that I just could not resist it.

Valentina

The testimony is taken from a September 2010 newsletter of the Sanctuary of St Michael the Archangel in Monte Sant' Angelo, Gargano, Italy.

Open door

In the evening there was a festival of St Michael the Archangel and I took in the unusual atmosphere of that place. Next morning I woke up early and ran to the grotto to participate in the first Mass in memory of St Michael's apparition. The priest was a pilgrim just like me and he could not have known anything about my confession. However, his homily referred to me and the life I used to live till yesterday afternoon. He talked about young people who were devoted to materialism, egotism, career and sexual impurity. Although I was ashamed of my deeds, I took Holy Communion begging God and St Michael for help. I did not realize that my request seemed to be a gap in the door of my heart which God entered through. The Lord enlightened my soul.

Room for God

I had an impression that I left a part of me in the Sanctuary when going back home. Yes, I was right, I left my past there. I broke up with my boyfriend and moved to my parents' house. A month later I also quit my job: my

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■ The entrance to the Basilica of St Michael the Archangel in Monte Sant Angelo, Italy

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Chaplet of St Michael

L. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

A. *Amen*

Say the following prayer on the medal:

O God, come to my assistance.

O Lord, make haste to help me.

Glory be to the Father, etc.

1. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Seraphim, may the Lord make us worthy to burn with the fire of perfect charity. Amen.
(1 Our Father on the first large bead, 3 Hail Mary on the next three small beads)

2. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Cherubim, may the Lord vouchsafe to grant us grace to leave the ways

of wickedness, to run in the paths of Christian perfection. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Mary)

3. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Thrones, may the Lord infuse into our hearts a true and sincere spirit of humility. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Mary)

4. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Dominions, may the Lord give us grace to govern our senses and subdue our unruly passions. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Mary)

5. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Powers, may the Lord vouchsafe to protect our souls against the snares and temptations of the devil. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Mary)

6. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Virtues, may the Lord deliver us from evil and suffer us not to fall into temptation. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Mary)

7. By the intercession of St Michael and the Celestial Choir of Principalities, may God fill our souls with a true spirit of obedience. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Mary)

8. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Archangels, may the Lord give us perseverance in faith and in all good works, in order that we gain the glory of Paradise. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Mary)

9. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Angels, may the Lord grant us to be protected by them in this mortal life and conducted hereafter to eternal glory. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Mary)

Recite on the next four beads:

1 Our Father

in honour of St Michael

1 Our Father

in honour of St Gabriel

1 Our Father

in honour of St Raphael

1 Our Father

in honour of our Guardian Angel

O glorious prince, St Michael, chief and commander of the heavenly hosts, guardian of souls, vanquisher of rebel spirits, servant in the house of the Divine King, and our admirable conductor, who shines with excellence and superhuman virtue, vouchsafe to deliver us from evil, who turn to you with confidence, and enable us by your gracious protection to serve God more and more faithfully every day. Amen.



Prayer of Pope Leo XIII

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the Divine Power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who wander throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.