

Lesson 14

Angels

An angel is a pure spirit created by God. The word "angel" means "messenger." The Old Testament includes the belief in angels. Angels play a significant role in the Bible and Salvation History. Saint Augustine says: *'Angel' is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is 'spirit'; if you seek the name of their office, it is 'angel': from what they are, 'spirit', from what they do, 'angel.'* With their whole beings the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they "always behold the face of my Father who is in Heaven" they are the "mighty ones who do His work, hearkening to the voice of His word" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 329).

"As purely spiritual creatures, angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness" (CCC 330). Christian doctrine teaches that the angels are spiritual beings who were created by God to serve Him. They can appear in human form and interact with us, but those bodies are only temporary illusions and pass away when their interaction with us ends. But as created beings, they exist within time as we do and do not know the future unless God reveals it to them. Since angels are spirits and do not have bodies, they do not have a gender and thus they cannot be male or female.



Guardian Angels

The purpose of the angels is to serve God, praise God, worship God, and pray to God. In the process of serving God, they also protect us, pray for us, inspire us, encourage us, and guide us during our journey on earth. Everyone has a guardian angel. Our guardian angels love us and do everything within God's Will to protect us from harm.

A guardian angel is an angel that has been assigned to guard a particular person, especially with respect to helping that person avoid spiritual dangers and achieve salvation. The angel may also help the person avoid physical dangers, particularly if this will help the person achieve salvation.

Guardian angels have the power to help our imagination in meditation. Since the imagination is one of our inner senses the angel can actually place holy images in the mind, especially if we ask their assistance. If demons can place impure images in someone's imagination, in their attempts to lure one into willful consent, then good angels can place holy images in the mind to move one to acts of love and virtue. Likewise, good angels can prevent demons from assaulting our imagination by guarding our minds.

The Guardian Angel prayer

Angel of God,
my guardian dear,
to whom God's love
commits me here,
ever this day (or night)
be at my side,
to light and guard,
to rule and guide. Amen.

What it conveys?

God loves us so much and so wants us to be holy that He entrusts each of us to an angelic guardian who is to serve as our light and guide.



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After our death, the guardian angel's work of guarding us is over. However, they do still have intercessory "work" to do if their charge is in purgatory. They carry the prayers of the suffering souls to Heaven and continue to act as an advocate. They give comfort and solace to the souls in purgatory. Remember that their work as advocate is most intense at the hour of our death. The guardian angels of those who die in grace work to procure a peaceful death and ward off the demons from any final assault. Once a person enters Heaven, the "work" of the guardian angel is over so the guardian angel rests for all eternity in the joy of the Lord.

What about the guardian angels of the damned? These guardian angels do not lose any of the joy they have in seeing God face-to-face. Even if the individual that they are in charge of is lost, they rejoice in the justice of God. They feel no sorrow and certainly no shame for the final fall of their charge.

The Nine Choirs of Angels

The nine choirs of angels are divided up into three groups of three called Triads: the Supreme (*or First*) Triad, the Middle (*or Second*) Triad, and the Lower (*or Third*) Triad. The Supreme Triad consists of the following groups of angels: the Seraphim, the Cherubim, and the Thrones. The Middle Triad is comprised of the following three groups of angels: the Dominions, the Virtues, and the Powers. The Lower Triad is made up of the following angels: the Principalities, the Archangels, and the Angels.

The Supreme Triad: The main function of these three choirs of angels is to contemplate and adore God directly.

1. Seraphim:

The Seraphim are “worshippers” of God. The word “Seraphim” means “Burning Love.” These are the highest order (*or choir*) of angels. They are the angels who are attendants (*or guardians*) before God's throne. Seraphim are the supreme choir, and were made for one thing alone: to love God. They praise God constantly. Seraphim have six wings: two cover their faces, two cover their feet, and two are for flying.

2. Cherubim:

The Cherubim are the guardians of the things of God. Cherubim rank after the Seraphim and are the second highest in the nine choirs of angels. They were closely linked to God's glory. They are manlike in appearance and double-winged. The Cherubim have an intimate knowledge of God and continually praise Him.

3. Thrones:

The Thrones carry out the justice of God. Thrones are the Angels of pure humility, peace, and submission. The lower Choirs of Angels need the Thrones to access God.

The Middle Triad: The main function of these three choirs of angels is to fulfill God's plan in the universe.

4. Dominions:

The Dominions rule the lower angels. Dominions are Angels of Leadership. They regulate the duties of the angels, making known the commands of God. The Thrones are the choir of authority. Every diocese, every kingdom, every religious community has its own angel taken from this choir. God assigns angels of this choir to persons who must give spiritual guidance as teachers in higher schools of learning, from the pulpit, or in the confessional.

5. Virtues:

The Virtues are the choir of angels that perform miracles. Virtues are known as the Spirits of Motion and control the elements. They are sometimes referred to as “the shining ones.” They govern all nature. They have control over seasons, stars, moon; even the sun is subject to their command. They are also in charge of miracles and provide courage, grace, and valor.

6. Powers:

The Choir of Powers consists of the angels that fight against evil forces. Powers are Warrior Angels against evil defending the cosmos and humans. They fight against evil spirits who attempt to wreak chaos. Powers are assigned to priests who are confessors of very devout souls. It has occurred that at their ordination, certain priests have received an angel from the choir of the Powers because they were destined to do much extraordinary work in the confessional.

The Lower Triad: The main function of these three choirs of angels is to interact with and serve humanity.

7. Principalities:

The Principalities are the angels that distribute spiritual goods. These angels are assigned to guard and care for communities, kingdoms, states, and parishes. Each parish has its own angel, who is taken from the choir of the Principalities.

8. Archangels:

The Archangels are the assistants of God and are called to fulfill His special missions. The Archangels are responsible for delivering the most supreme messages of God to humanity. They are the most frequently mentioned throughout the Bible. They may be of this or other hierarchies as St. Michael Archangel, who is a princely Seraph. The Archangels have a unique role as God's messenger to the people at critical times in history and salvation. A feast day celebrating the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael is celebrated throughout the Church on September 29. Of special significance is St. Michael as he has been invoked as patron and protector by the Church from the time of the Apostles. He is described as the "chief of princes" and as the leader of the forces of heaven in their triumph over Satan and his followers.

9. Angels:

The angels are tasked with helping people to reach Heaven by guiding and protecting each human being from both spiritual and physical harm. This choir of angels includes our guardian angel. These angels are closest to the material world and human beings. They deliver man's prayers to God and God's answers back to man. Angels have the capacity to access any and all other angels at any time. They are the most caring and social to assist those who ask for help.

Saints

A saint is a person whom the Church believes now lives with God in Heaven. When an individual enters into Heaven, he or she becomes a saint, having a purified soul and a body that reflects the Resurrected Body of Jesus Christ. Our spiritual goal is sainthood. A saint is a person just like you that God gave special graces to in order for them to do special things. Some of the saints could work miracles, some could heal, and some had

the ability to be in two places at once. God knew these people, as He knows us, and gave them these abilities because He knew they would do His Will.

The Catholic Church elevates certain individuals whose lives exemplify what it means to love God. The saints were not perfect people, but they are spiritual guides and companions. We believe that a saint has led a holy and virtuous life that models a path for us to follow. Through God's grace, the saints have received what we all hope to receive one day, which is God's promised Salvation. The saints are spiritual role models for us. By declaring an individual a saint, the Church acknowledges that evidence of God's grace was at work in that person's life as an authentic witness to Christ. Because of the abundance of God's grace in their lives, the saints can intercede before God on behalf of the living. Therefore, the saints are our heavenly intercessors (*individuals who pray for the needs of others*).



Our Catholic Tradition distinguishes the prayer and worship we offer to God from the veneration and honor we give to both Mary (*who is Queen of Angels and Saints*) and the saints. Prayer is properly directed only toward God. Of all the saints, Mary is given a place of honor, and we offer special devotion to her. When we honor the saints, we ask for their intercession on our behalf with God. The effects of our devotion to the saints come from God's grace alone. The Catholic Church is often accused of worshipping the saints. We do not worship the saints; we worship only God. However, we venerate the saints. The saints only assist us in our prayers to God. We only ask for the saint's intercession for us to God. In a sense, the saints wrap up our prayers real nice and hand them to God for us. They can talk to God for us since they see Him face-to-face. Then it is up to God to either say "yes" or "no."

How does the Catholic Church Make a Saint?

The process used by the Catholic Church to name a saint is called "Canonization." This process has been used since the 10th century. There are basically five steps:

Step 1: Getting the Person Recognized

The individual who lived a truly moral life is brought to the attention of the local bishop. Therefore, it's up to the local bishop of the diocese where the person lived and died to start the process. The local bishop must wait five years after the person has died before being able to ask the Vatican permission to investigate the individual for sainthood. Once permission is given by the Vatican, the process can continue. At this stage, the candidate is given a new title, "Servant of God."

Step 2: Thorough Background Check

From personal diaries to official documents, everything that the individual wrote or published is studied. Their life is the proverbial "open book." Anything and everything written about the candidate is also reviewed. The general public is also asked to share their opinion on the candidate. They are free to share any information they have about the candidate as well as personal experiences. The goal of this lengthy background investigation is to prove the candidate lived a life of "heroic virtues," meaning they strictly followed the virtues of faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. Once this investigative phase is completed (*which can take many years*), the local bishop and a diocesan committee decide whether or not the candidate truly lived a life of heroic virtues. If they find the candidate did, all the collected data, or Acta (*Acts*), are sent to the **Congregation for the Causes of the Saints** in Rome.

Step 3: The Scrutiny

Once in Rome, the "Positio" (*an official bound book that includes all the documents, interviews, and witness testimonies collected over the years*) is created. This is basically a final argument as to why the candidate should become a saint. The Positio is examined with a fine-toothed comb by a theological commission who give their vote on whether or not they believe the individual meets the necessary criteria. If the majority of the theologians vote favorably, the case is passed on for examination by cardinals and bishops who are members of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. If they vote in favor of the case as well, the prefect (*high-ranking official*) of the Congregation gives the results to the pope. Once the pope declares the candidate led a virtuous and holy life, he or she is given the title, "Venerable." Venerable means the individual led a life that is worthy of being imitated.

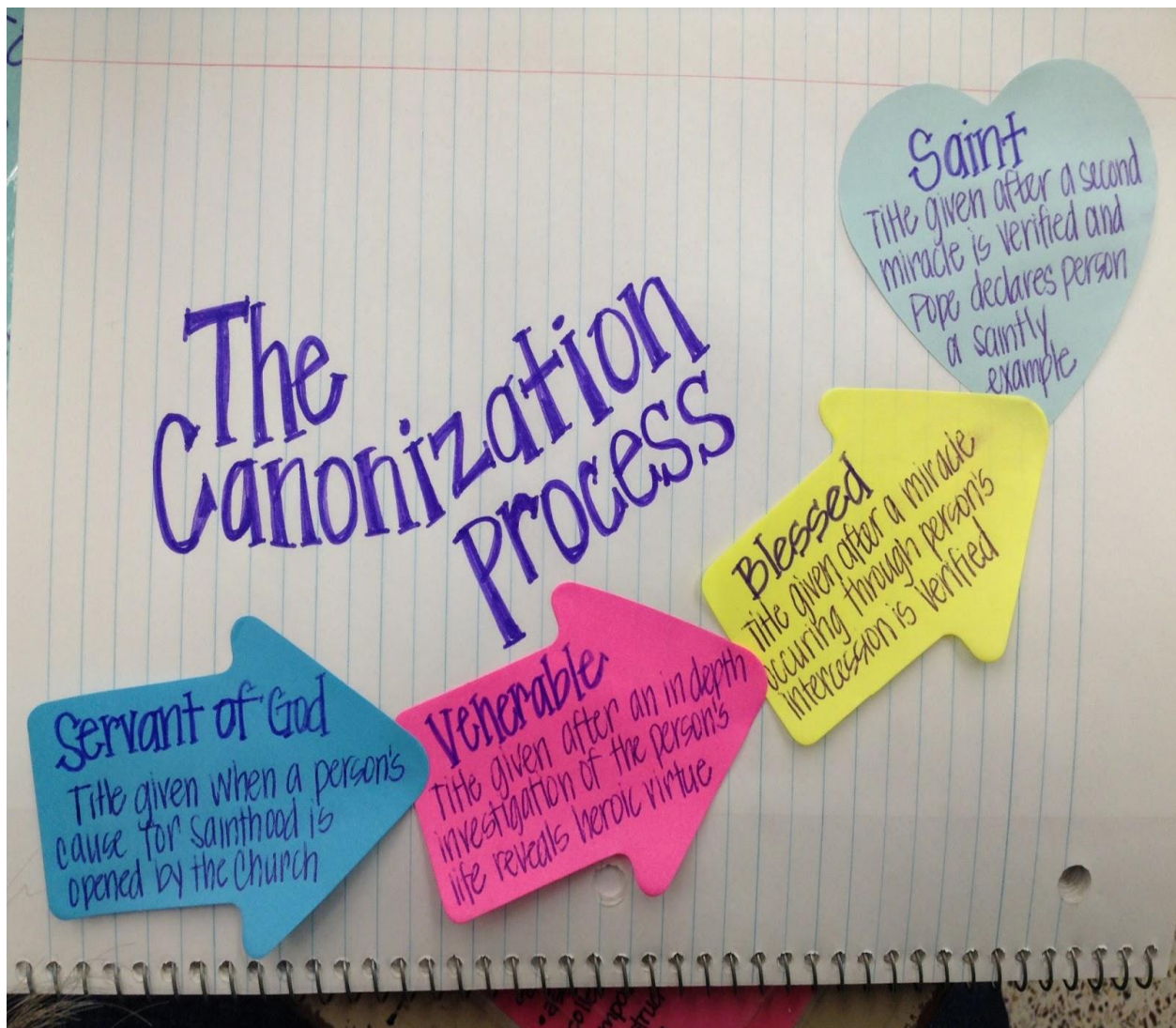
Step 4: Beatification

The required step for beatification is the pope's approval of one miracle. Most miracles in the beatification and canonization process are medically related. Any reported miracles are reviewed by a theological panel. The miracle must be a result of praying directly to the candidate for sainthood for a cure. If the family and friends of a patient have been praying only to the candidate for a cure, then the miracle is validated. But, if they have

been praying to any other saints, as well as the candidate for sainthood, then it's not clear if the miracle came from the candidate or another saint. Medical experts are also part of the beatification process. They're asked to show that there is absolutely no medical explanation for the cure. Once the cure is proven to be a miracle, the decision is forwarded to the pope. Once beatified by the pope, the Venerable Servant of God is given the new title of "Blessed."

Step 5: Canonization

After beatification, the Catholic Church requires a second miracle as the final step to sainthood. While a miracle is not required for a martyr (*an individual who was put to death for the faith*) to be beatified, a miracle is required for a martyr to be canonized. Once a second miracle has been approved, the pope declares the person a "Saint." That tells us that the person has led a holy life, is in Heaven, and is to be honored by the Catholic Church.



Why Does the Church Require Miracles for Sainthood?

Many people wonder why miracles are necessary to make a person a saint. They ask, "Isn't living a holy and devout life enough?" The Church believes miracles are necessary because they confirm that the candidate is in Heaven and has the power to plead on our behalf to God for a miracle.

What Is a Catholic Feast Day?

The Catholic Church assigns one date out of the year for each and every canonized saint known as the saint's feast day. The saints are remembered on their individual feast days with special mention, prayers, and possibly a scripture reading.

A saint's feast day can be the day of their actual death or a day assigned by the Church. Typically, the Church only assigns a day when the day of death is unknown or if several other saints are already assigned to that day. The number of canonized saints, however, is greater than the number of days in a calendar year, so two or more saints often share the same feast day.

Relics

A relic is a piece of the body of a saint or something that belonged to a saint. There are three types of relics: First Class, Second Class, and Third Class. A **First Class Relic** is an actual body part of a saint. A **Second Class Relic** is an article of clothing or a personal artifact of a saint. A **Third Class Relic** is an item (*such as a piece of cloth or holy card*) that touched a First Class Relic. It is important to remember that relics are NOT good luck charms or magical items; they are merely mementos of holy people. Relics are venerated, NOT adored, because they represent the original owner (*the saint*).

Litany of the Saints

A litany is a form of prayer in which a number of petitions are offered and the congregation responds. The Litany of the Saints is a special form of litany because it is in this prayer that we ask the saints to pray for us by naming individual saints. This prayer is often prayed as part of the Easter Vigil and at ordinations.

Martyrs

A martyr is an individual who has given his or her life for the faith. "Martyr" comes from the Greek word for "*witness*." A martyr is the supreme witness to the truth of the faith and to Jesus Christ to whom he or she is united. A Christian martyr is ready to suffer violence and be killed for their love of Christ or for a conscientious decision made on the basis of faith.

Doctors of the Church

This is a very special title given by the Catholic Church to certain saints. This title indicates that the writings and preaching of such a person are useful to Christians "in any age of the Church." While the writings of the Doctors are often considered inspired by the Holy

Spirit; this does not mean they are infallible, but it does mean that they contributed significantly to the formulation of Christian teaching in at least one area.

Patron Saints

Patron saints are chosen as special protectors or guardians over areas of life. These areas can include occupations, illnesses, churches, countries, causes -- anything that is important to us. Here on earth, "patrons" are people who give a lot of support and encouragement to certain causes or groups they really know, love and care about. Saints are Heavenly Patrons; they give special care to people, places, professions, and institutions.

We are always in God's presence and can relate to God directly through Jesus. However, it is nice to have models of people who struggled like us in our common goal of following Jesus. Having patron saints is not about giving glory to that particular person but about giving glory to God. We ask the saints for their help so that we might better know, love, and serve God. We are required to select a Patron Saint for the Sacrament of Confirmation. This saint becomes a role model and guide for us on our spiritual journey. It is important to choose a patron saint who has special meaning for you.

