

What Catholics Believe about Angels

by Fr. John Girotti

I'd like to speak to you a bit about angels. Yes, angels, those spiritual creatures that watch over us and serve God our creator. I'd like to tell you what we believe as Catholics about angels, so that you will not be confused by what our popular culture says about them.

First and foremost, angels exist. They are pure spirits — they have been created by God to serve him and to do his bidding. There are numerous references to angels in the Bible; we know that in the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament, angels served as messengers. Angels waited on Christ when he was tempted in the desert and angels set St. Peter free from prison. And yes, it was the angel Gabriel who came to the Blessed Virgin Mary to announce the Good News of our salvation.

Because they are pure spirits, angels have no bodies. (Yes, that means they ordinarily have no wings ... sorry.) Occasionally, they may assume human form so that their message might be received by us, but they have no physical form of their own. Because they are pure spirits, they have very powerful intellects and thus are very intelligent. However, despite their intelligence, they cannot read hearts or minds. Like us, they have the use of free will which they may use to either obey God or not.

The great majority of the angels are good and holy; they have remained obedient to God. However, there are fallen angels, those who have refused to obey God. The chief among them is the devil, Satan, or Lucifer. The devil is a fallen angel — first and foremost — with all the powers and limitations that go with it. The devil is nowhere near as powerful as God, but because he is an angel, he and his followers possess very keen minds which they use to tempt and lure us away from God. Reasons for Satan's fall from grace are many and open to conjecture, but it is generally believed that when God the Father revealed to all the angels of his plan to send his Son Jesus to save us, Satan couldn't accept it.

Today there seems to be a practice among some people to say that when a loved one dies, especially a child, that the loved one is now "an angel in heaven." This is rather sweet but really not correct. When we die, we remain children of God. We don't turn into an angel. Let me remind you that Jesus Christ suffered and died to save us, not the angels! The dignity we possess by our baptism is enough. We will not turn into angels when we die. Although angels possess a greater intellect than ours, we have a greater dignity because of what Jesus did for us. He came to save us!

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