

HCSC Summer Bible Series 2019 “Angels & Demons”

The Role of the Angels in Every Liturgy

Origen reasons that if *the angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear Him and shall deliver them* (Psalm 34:7), then it is probable that when many are assembled legitimately for the glory of Christ, the angel of each that fears God encamps around him. Thus, when the saints are gathered there is a twofold Church: that of men and that of angels.

We cannot see the multitude of angels because our eyes are dimmed due to sin; nevertheless, Scripture attests to their presence. For example,

When the young servant of Elisha the man of God got up and went out early in the morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. So he asked Elisha, “Oh, my master, what are we to do?” “Do not be afraid,” Elisha answered, “for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:15-17).



So, there *are* multitudes of angels who gather with us, though our eyes, blinded by sin and sensuality, cannot see them. Scripture says further and thrillingly,

The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary. (Psalm 68:17).

Because the Mass is a participation in the heavenly liturgy, we are further assured that there are myriad angels and many saints round about. Scripture says of the Sacred Liturgy,

You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to myriads of angels in joyful assembly, to the congregation of the firstborn, enrolled in heaven. You have come to God the judge of all men, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,

to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:22-24).

The Fathers, tapping into these traditions, speak of the angels' presence:

- Origen warns that the angels are listening to the homily and judging it.
- Theodore of Mopsuestia sees in the deacons who arrange the sacrifice on the altar an image of the invisible powers of the angels also ministering.
- St John Chrysostom says that the angels surround the priest, and the whole sanctuary is filled with angels honoring Christ, present in the Eucharist. He adds that we, though lowly, have been deemed worthy to join the powers of Heaven in the worship of the Lord.
- The Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer also attests to the presence of many angels. For example, "And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts ..." (Common Preface I). St John Chrysostom says of the Preface, "Reflect upon who it is you are near and with whom you are about to invoke God—the Cherubim! Think of the Choirs you are about to enter. Let no one have any thought of earth (*sursum corda*). Let him lose himself of every earthly thing and transport himself whole and entire into heaven. Let him abide there beside the very throne of glory hovering with the Seraphim and singing the most holy song of the God of glory and majesty."
- St John Chrysostom further notes that the Gloria is the song of the lower angels and that even catechumens can sing it. The Sanctus, though, is the song of the Seraphim in the very sanctuary of the Trinity and is reserved for the baptized.
- St. John Chrysostom also says, "For if the very air is filled with angels, how much more the Church! Hear the apostles teaching this when he bids women to cover their heads with a veil because of the presence of the angels. ... The angels exult, the Archangels rejoice, the Cherubim and Seraphim join us in the celebration of [the] feast ... What room is there for sadness?"

In this last point St. John seems to suggest that because a woman's hair is her glory, it should be covered in the presence of God and the angels. Men, who tend to indicate rank and status with their hats, should similarly shed such distinction in the presence of God and the angels. This is why bishops, priests, and all clergy remove their head coverings prior to entering the sanctuary for the Eucharistic prayer.

Here, then, is but a brief reflection on the role and presence of the angels in the Sacred Liturgy. Tomorrow's post will be a short treatise on the role of the angels at the Last Judgment.

