

HCSC Summer Bible Series 2019 “Angels and Demons”

On the Role of the Angels at the Second Coming – DAY 4

This is the last in a series of five posts on the role of the angels in our lives and in creation. The fundamental source for these reflections is Jean Cardinal Danielou’s book [The Angels and Their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church](#). The references to the Fathers in my posts are fully footnoted in his book, but some of the scriptural passages below represent my own additions.

I encourage you to read Cardinal Danielou’s book. It is relatively short (a mere 114 pages) and packed with stirring and edifying accounts of the works of the angels according to Scripture and the Fathers of the Church.

In this last post we consider the role of the angels at the parousia (the second coming) and the glory that awaits those who have been faithful.

The final chapters in the Cardinal’s book, on the eschaton (the last things) and the parousia, are particularly magnificent. I would like to distill them here, adding some material and reworking it just a bit. However, the assembling of the material is fundamentally his. I hope you will be stirred with as much joy and zeal in reading this as I was in preparing it.

We must soberly admit our need to be ready, by God’s grace. If we are, what glories await us! The “great and terrible day of the Lord” will indeed be great for those who have allowed the Lord to prepare them.

Sending forth the multitude of angels

Scripture is replete with descriptions of the role of angels in the great second coming of the Lord. In the Gospel of Matthew there is a text that may refer to 70 A.D. but surely also describes the end of time:

Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matt 24:30-31).

The First Letter to the Thessalonians says,

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise ... (1 Thess 4:16).

St. Cyril describes the extraordinary magnificence given to the final judgment by the presence of the multitude of angels. He considers how the great depth and breadth of the spiritual world has been invisible up to this point except to the eyes of faith; at the final judgment it is suddenly made manifest! Cyril asks us to imagine the multitude of angels by considering all the human beings who have *ever* existed, from the time of Adam to the present day, standing before the Lord Jesus. Then he asks us to consider that the angels are vastly more numerous than that, for they are the ninety-nine sheep while humanity is the one! As Daniel poetically says,

Thrones were set up and the Ancient of Days took his throne. His clothing was white as snow, the hair on his head like pure wool; His throne was flames of fire, with wheels of burning fire. A river of fire surged forth, flowing from where he sat; Thousands upon thousands were ministering to him, and myriads upon myriads stood before him (Dan 7:9-10).

Waking the dead (the angels are surely part of this)

The Second Sibylline Book, a Christian work, describes the archangels shattering the gates of death and raising up the bodies of even those who had been drowned in the sea or devoured by savage beasts (Sib, 2:214–235).

St. Ephrem speaks of the angels as waking the dead, saying,

Then the Lord will appear in the heavens like lightning with an unspeakable glory. The Angels and the Archangels will go on before his glory like flames of fire, like a mighty torrent. The Cherubim will turn their faces and the Seraphim will fly ahead crying out in fear: “Arise, you who sleep. Behold the bridegroom is coming!” Then the tombs will be opened and in the flash of an eye all the people will rise and behold the beauty of the Bridegroom.

St. Paul says that *our* bodies will rise, but they will be gloriously transformed:

He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself (Phil 3:21).

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power (1 Cor 15:42).

The judgment by Christ and its execution by the angels

Matthew 13 describes the angels as separating the wicked from the just:

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Mat 14:41-43).

Matthew 25 describes the angels as being with Christ when He takes His judgment seat:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matt 25:31-32).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem speaks of the angels leading the sinners away, body and soul, “in the full sight of the armies of heaven and they will be unable to escape. But the angels are also uniting the just.”

St. Ephrem describes the angels leading the elect to paradise:

Then the angels will come together from all sides and take up the holy and faithful people into the glory of the clouds above, to their meeting place with Christ.

Origen speaks of the angels escorting the blessed to paradise:

When ... we have begun to enter the holy place and pass on to the promised land, those who are really holy and whose place is the Holy of Holies will make their way, supported by the angels and unto the tabernacle of God. ... They will be carried on [the angels'] shoulders and raised up by their hands.

St. Paul seems to speak to the same glory when he writes to the Thessalonians,

The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17).

The final ordering of the Kingdom

Of this final ordering, Scripture says,

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. "For God has put all things in subjection under [Jesus'] feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection under him," it is plain that he [the Father] is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone (1 Cor 15:26-28).

After rendering judgment, Jesus returns to His Father's right, in the Holy of Holies

Jesus ascends there, with all the members of His Body (body and soul) joined to Him. He ascends to the throne as *Unus Christus, amans seipsum* (one Christ, loving Himself). Though co-equal to His Father in glory and majesty, He is delighted to hand over the Kingdom of His Body, the Church, to His Father, who is (as Father) the *Principium Deitatis*.

At this ascension, the Fathers ponder that the angels will make the same declaration, the heavens echoing with their cry:

Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, O ancient doors; that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory (Psalm 24: 7-10).

The transformation of all creation

The longing of creation for its share in the glorious freedom of the Children of God is prophesied through St. Paul:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it [because of our sins]. But the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:19-23).

Now it comes! Heaven and earth are united, and creation receives its original glory and more, for the heavenly realities are now joined to the earth, beautifully restored and raised. Scripture says,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:1-5).

The joy and rest of the angels

Cardinal Danielou beautifully concludes,

On that day, the joy of the friends of the Bridegroom [the angels] will be complete. They have led to paradise the souls of the just who are entrusted to them. They have kept watch over their mortal remains. But [for now] they still await the day in which the Bridegroom will come to look for his Bride, when her beauty is finally perfect, in order to lead her into the House of his Father for the eternal wedding feast (p. 114).

Of this magnificent beauty St. Methodius says,

Oh dearly beloved, [the angels] burn to see the day of your marriage, all the angels Christ has called from heaven. They will come, O Lord, O Word, and they will carry with them mighty gifts, in their spotless robes.

Thus, we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17).

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." ... He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints (Rev 22:17; 20-21).

And thus the Scriptures end, with the longing of the Bride for unity with her Husband. Yes, the Bride, the Church, cries out to her beloved, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

<https://youtu.be/ngSsaSimi8A>