



LIGHT & LIFE

VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

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Our Father as Mission

There is an image of the Church that used to be in common use for almost two millennia, but has fallen out of favor recently as not being “politically correct,” and that image is that of the “Church Militant,” with the accompanying metaphor of the individual believer as a “*miles Christi*,” that is, a “soldier of Christ.” Oddly enough, this was one of the preferred images in the early Church, borrowing from St. Paul, even though the early Church tended toward pacifism. Saints such as St. Francis and St. Ignatius of Loyola used this image for themselves and their orders. All of a sudden, in the last generation or so, we got “enlightened” and threw out the imagery of the Christian soldier, ripping “Onward Christian Soldier” out of the hymnals, as many denominations did in the 80’s and 90’s.

My theory is that their idea of what a soldier is about is as impoverished as their idea of what being a Christian is about, to be blunt. Perhaps they were watching too many Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger action movies with their high kill rates; I don’t know. We could explore this military theme in our faith in many ways, but I will offer a theme that was used to good effect in a war movie from 2001, and that is the classic military credo: leave no man behind, or if you wish, leave no one behind.

I think this theme is a lot truer of what the Church militant is about. We are not a “Kill them all; let God sort them out!” faith. What we have in “leave no man behind” is the very goal of our Christian faith. Our Heavenly Father wishes to lose no one, not a *single soul* to the enemy. Even if we are wounded or perish on this earthly battlefield, the idea is still the same: we try to bring everyone home. *Everyone*.

This idea is clearer, if we look at Isaiah 55:10-12. There, the Lord speaks of sending His word, which we know is THE Word, Jesus Christ, and who is sent forth on a mission by His Father, and He will not return to the

Father until He accomplishes what He has done. He does not return to the Father empty-handed, but rather, presents to Him all the souls that He has ransomed. And He accomplishes this even though He Himself lays down His life in the field of battle, at the battlefield between Good and Evil called Golgotha.

In the same way, we are sent by the Father, not to return until we fulfill our own individual mission on this Earth. But what are our instructions while we remain here on Earth?



Assumption of Mary,
Annibale Carracci.
Museo del Prado. Public Domain.

Well, that varies from person to person. We all have different gifts, talents, abilities and tasks. But we can take the Lord’s prayer as a model: *Our Father who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name. We acknowledge who is sending us, who is giving the orders. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.* That is, we wish to carry out the mission on which the Father sends us. *Give us this day our daily bread.* The original word here for daily bread is closer to “daily rations.” Thus, give us what we need to carry out this mission, Father. *And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* In other words, do not bind us, do not tie us down, but free us from all things that keep us from You. In the same manner, allow us to unbind our brothers and sisters from those things

which keep them bound here on Earth. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* And finally, we ask our Father to bring us home, to not leave us behind.

But notice the continuation here. Remember what I said, leave NO MAN behind? *God means it.* If you wish to not be left behind yourself, to return home to the Father, you *have* to unbind your brothers and sisters as well. You *have* to forgive *them*, if *you yourself* want to be forgiven. Think of what the priest does in absolution. To absolve means, literally, to loosen a knot, to untie someone, to free them from something. It’s very hard to rescue someone who is

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Novena of Masses in honor of the

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

August 6-14, 2026

TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

What are Angels? - Baltimore Catechism

By Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P.

Continuing with the Baltimore Catechism lessons:

***35 Q. What are angels?**

A. Angels are pure spirits without a body, created to adore and enjoy God in Heaven.

"Angels" are not the same as saints. Saints are those who at one time lived upon the earth as we do, and who on account of their very good lives are now in Heaven. They had bodies as we have. The angels, on the contrary, never lived visibly upon the earth. In the beginning God was alone. We take great pleasure in looking at beautiful things. God, seeing His own beauty, and knowing that others would have very great pleasure and happiness in seeing Him, determined to create some beings who could enjoy this happiness; and thus He wished to share with them the happiness which He Himself derived from seeing His own beauty. Therefore He created angels who were to be in Heaven with Him, singing His praises and worshipping before His throne.

The angels are not all equal in dignity, but are divided into nine classes, or choirs, according to their rank or office, and, as theologians tell us, arranged from the lowest to the highest and named as follows; angels, archangels, virtues, powers, principalities, dominations, thrones, cherubim, and seraphim. Archangels are higher than angels and are so called because they are sent to do the most important works. It was the Archangel Michael who drove Lucifer from Heaven and the Archangel Gabriel who announced to the Blessed Virgin that she was to be the Mother of God. The angels receive their names from the duties they perform. The word angel signifies messenger.

***36 Q. Were the angels created for any other purpose?**

A. The angels were also created to assist before the throne of God and to minister unto Him; they have often been sent as messengers from God to man; and are also appointed our guardians.

The duties of the angels are many. Some remain always in Heaven with God; some are sent to earth to be our guardians and to remain with us. Each of us has an angel to take care of us. He is with us night and day, and offers our prayers and good works to God. He prays for us, exhorts us to do good and avoid evil; and he protects us from dangers spiritual and temporal. How unfortunate then must one be to cause him to return to Heaven with sad complaints to God; such as: "The one whom I have in charge will not obey Thy laws or use the grace Thou sendest him: with all my efforts to save him, he continues to do wrong." He will be doubly sad when he sees other angels returning with good reports and receiving new graces for those whom God has committed to their care. If you love your guardian angel, never impose on him the painful duty of bringing to God the report of your evil doings.

Now, how do we know that the angels offer our prayers and good works to God? We know it from the beautiful story of Tobias, told in the Holy Scripture. (Tobias)... [The angel] told the old Tobias how he (the angel) had carried up to God his prayers and good works while he was burying the dead. When they heard he was an angel they fell down and revered him, being very much afraid. From this beautiful history we know that the angels carry our prayers and good works to God... Besides the guardian angel for each person, there are also guardian angels for each city and for each nation...

But here is a difficulty. If God Himself watches over us and sees all things, why should the angels guard us? It is on account of God's goodness to us; though it is not necessary. He does not wish us to have any excuse for being bad, so He gives us each a special heavenly servant to watch and assist us by his prayers. If a friend received us into his house and did all he could for us himself, we should certainly be satisfied, but if he gave us a special servant, though it would not be necessary, he would show us great respect and kindness. Moreover whatever the angels do for us, we might say God Himself does, for the angels are only obeying His commands.

This beautiful section from the Baltimore Catechism had to be edited for length a little bit to fit in our newsletter, but here we will deal with the holy angels as traditionally listed, that is, the hierarchy of angels, and finally, their number.

The Holy Hierarchy

As we have seen before, in our egalitarian age, the word "hierarchy" is often viewed in a negative light, since it seems to go against our democratic principles, equality, and equity. But this is due to human weakness and sin, not because of a per se evil in hierarchical structures. Satan, the fallen angel, fell because he wanted dominion over the lesser beings, to be a god over them. St. Joseph, the Just Man, is honored and venerated because, though he was the head of the Holy Family on Earth, he did not assert dominion over the Blessed Virgin Mary and Our Lord, but humbly served and protected them. **Hierarchy is for service, not dominion.**

So why are some angels seemingly higher than others? Are they not all made of the same angelic "stuff"?

St. Thomas Aquinas argues that as purely incorporeal beings, that is, purely spiritual, they cannot have the same kind of classification we use for material creatures. He uses the example of whiteness (*cf. Summa Theologiae, I IIa, Q 50, a 2*). There is not a "white" we can point to as being the substance called "white," but rather we see "white" in individual material beings. There is a humanity common to every person, which is individually instantiated through matter, so each human being belongs to the same genus and species. But you cannot have separate "humanities" we could point to. You have one humanity, but many individuals.

As purely spiritual and intellectual creatures, angels have no “matter” to differentiate them, rather, they are differentiated individually as spiritual. This can get confusing, but let’s just sum it up to say that each angel has a different nature and powers, so each angel is individuated by the nature proper to that *specific* angel. They are all lumped together under that genus we call “angels” because they all share a similar immaterial, spiritual, and intellectual nature, but each is its own angel. I myself would be “Fr. Dismas”, an individual instance of human, what we biologically call *homo sapiens*. Angels all fall under “angelus,” but each angel would be something like *angelus gabriel*, for the Archangel Gabriel, for example, if we were to try to apply material classification to angels.

Therefore, hierarchies in angels are in a way more natural to them than we would have among ourselves. We assume or are placed in hierarchies here on Earth, though these are always shifting and changing – as we Dominicans like to say about our method of governance in our Order, “Peacock today, feather duster tomorrow.”

So what about the angels and their hierarchies? In Heaven, the hierarchies of the human saints are not because of their *material* greatness, but because of their *spiritual* greatness. We make spiritual “gains,” so to speak, working out our salvation through our material bodies. The more the human saint shines spiritually by being more holy (that is, more like God), the higher in the heavens the human saint, which is why the Blessed Virgin Mary is above all other saints, even the angels. This is not by means of her humanity, which we all share, but by her spiritual holiness, which is elevated even above the “natural” holiness of angels through grace. Each individual angel, being outside of material time, had one choice to make, whether to serve or reject God. We as temporal creatures, in our human capacity, have the opportunity to share more and more in the life of the Trinity throughout time.

The evil angels thus corrupted their natural holiness and fell forever. The higher the angel that fell, the greater the corruption. There is a kind of twisted and perverse “negative” hierarchy in Hell, whereby the more unlike God an angel is, the further it is from God, and thus, the greater the punishment. All of us individual human beings share in the same humanity, which is elevated by means of the Incarnation of Christ, who lifts us through His divinity closer to Himself. But we can fall and be corrupted spiritually all the same; just more or less through time, until time stops for us, and we enter eternity.

To summarize, the closer, or more holy (that is, closer to God), that each angel is, the higher its place in its own natural hierarchy. The closer to God each angel is, like us humans, the more intense the pure love burns within them. Each one is perfectly happy in the fullness of sharing in the joy that is Heaven. Envy and jealousy are pretty silly things to have in Heaven, and have no place there. Each creature in Heaven assumes the fullness of joy it is capable of receiving and participating in. If you want to complain about your future place in Heaven, then start working on your “rank” here on earth. But if you get to Heaven, it won’t bother you.

The Angelic Order (not the Dominican One)

We arrive at this time to the concept of orders in the angelic hierarchy. It would seem that if each angel is its own “species,” then each angel might be its own order, but here are more broad categories (that is, orders), within this hierarchy. To compare it to something human, we have one hierarchy of ordained men, but within this hierarchy we have three major orders: bishop, priest, and deacon. The higher the order, the more general power of the ministerial office each individual has. An auxiliary bishop is a bishop, as much as the pope is a bishop, though within this broadest idea of ministerial office, the pope has *the* broadest ministerial office. Note that while a pope can resign from the papacy, he cannot definitively resign from the episcopacy, being a bishop. He is a bishop forever, as much as a priest is a priest forever.

In an analogous way, the angels are so classified. We have nine choirs of angels, taken from Scripture and Holy Tradition. Within this hierarchy of angels, we have three orders, and within each order, they are likewise hierarchically arranged.

In this first order of angels (the first hierarchy), we have the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones. These are the angels who have the most immediate “access” to God, who is wholly simple (that is, not made of “parts”), God and utterly God in Himself. These angels have the broadest view of God by nature, because they are closer to Him and can see and understand God more immediately.

In the second order of angels (the second hierarchy), we have Dominions, Virtues, and Powers. The idea of God here becomes “divided.” They do not contemplate God as One as naturally as do the higher angels. They begin to “see” how the idea and power of God is manifested in Creation.

In the third order of angels, the final hierarchy, we have Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. These understand the knowledge passed down from the higher angelic orders, and see it as it relates in more specific instances, such as the laws of nature and individuals. They are the closest to us, insofar as they understand God, not simply in Himself, but through the actions and laws of God as manifested through the will of God.

On the Last Day, these offices that the Angels hold will have already served their purpose, since their mission, just like ours, will be complete. There is no need for their mission. But their natural hierarchy remains, because they are already in various degrees of closeness and holiness to God.

The Nine

Okay, so what are the nine choirs of angels in themselves, and what do they do? For this, let me cite Dr. Peter Kreeft, a professor in philosophy and excellent Catholic apologist:

“The first three levels see and adore God directly:

The seraphim, the highest choir, comprehend God with maximum clarity, and therefore their love flames the hottest. (“Seraphim” means “the burning ones.”) Lucifer (“Light-bearer”) was once one of them. That’s why he’s still very powerful and dangerous.

The cherubim contemplate God too, but less in himself than in his providence, his wise plan for creatures. ("Cherubim" means "fullness of wisdom.")

The thrones contemplate God's power and judgments. (Thrones symbolize judicial, juridical power.)

The next three choirs fulfill God's providential plans for the universe, like middle management personnel:

The dominations or "dominions" (... "authority"), command the lesser angels below them.

The virtues receive their orders from the dominations and "run" the universe, so to speak, especially the heavenly bodies. ("Virtue" used to mean power, might, or energy.)

The powers serve the virtues by fighting against evil influences that oppose the virtues' providential plan.

The last three choirs directly order human affairs:

The principalities care for earthly principalities, that is, cities and nations and kingdoms.

The archangels (such as Gabriel) carry God's important messages to man.

Ordinary angels are the "guardian angels," one for each individual." (*Angels and Demons: What do We Really Know about Them?*, pg.74-75. Kreeft, Peter, Ignatius Press, 1995)

As he himself would say, these are not dogmatic definitions, but taken from broad sources in Scripture and theological writings.

How Many Angels?

Short answer: No idea. Longer answer: More than a few billion, for sure. How can we know this?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (no. 336), quoting St. Basil, teaches us that, "Besides each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life." The last estimate I have seen for world population currently places it above eight and a quarter billion souls. Are they "recycled" after we die? Do they get assigned a new soul when their earthly mission with us is complete? That seems possible, although for me it does not seem as fitting. It would seem to me that each angel has a particular mission, and that once their individual charge that they have watched over is sent to her particular judgment, then the angel waits until the Final Day to be at our side. In the time between our death and the Final Day, they would assist all the other angels. If we go with a strict one guardian angel per one soul, that places the total above one hundred billion (the estimated number of people since our appearance on this earth).

That's just the guardian angels. But how many of each angelic choir? Again, it would seem fitting that the higher in the hierarchy, the fewer the number. Hebrews 12:22 famously speaks of "countless angels in festal gathering." The Greek word here is *μυριάσιν* (*myriasín*), meaning literally "ten thousand," but often poetically meaning "countless," as we use it in English, "myriad." Some biblical translations here use "thousands," but the literary idea is the same, that the number cannot be readily counted. If you really want to know the exact number, well, when you get to Heaven, you'll have all eternity to count!

Our Father as Mission (Continued from page 1)

tied down in leg irons and balls and chains. You *have* to get rid of those chains. If you do not release those chains that you have tied yourself with your brother and sister, whom you refuse to forgive, how can *you* be rescued? How can you come home? You are binding yourself to this mortal realm, not letting yourself be free to ascend home. It's very hard to rescue or save the unwilling. Let go of those chains that you use to bind your brother and sister, so that in the end, your brother can come home, your sister can come home, I can come home, YOU can come home. Remember, the success of our mission from our Father is not determined in casualties inflicted on the Enemy, but that we leave no man, no woman, no child, not a single soul, behind.

So, onward, Christian soldiers! We have our mission: pick up those rosaries, say those Our Fathers, LIVE the Our Fathers, and let's help bring everyone home.

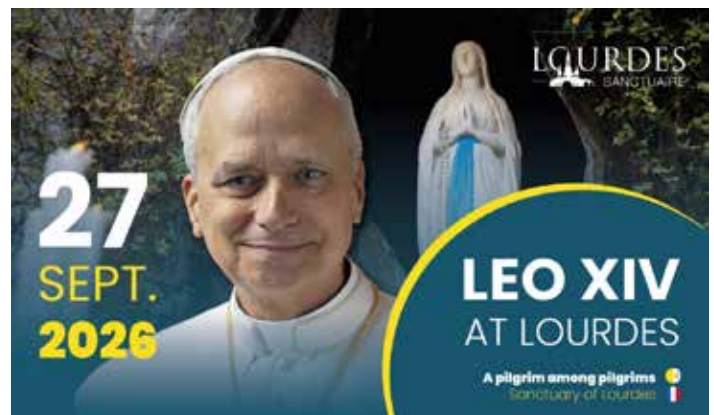
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November 20-22, 2026
February 5-7, 2027
April 9-11, 2027

Often the best way to discern whether you are called to our way of life is to attend a "Come and See" Vocation Weekend. These events provide an opportunity for young men who are seriously interested in the Dominican Order to experience life with the brethren and learn more about the Order. Connect with our Director of Vocations, Fr. John Winkowitsch, O.P., and learn more about these weekends, at opwest.org/comeandsee



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Please pray for the Holy Father in his apostolic visit to France.