

MICHAEL SHOUTS, 'WHO IS LIKE GOD!'



Mother Emily, the first Sister and founder of the Community of the Sisters of the Church, deeply desired that each Sister in the Community and the Community as a whole would work and pray to the honour and glory of God and be an instrument for the coming of God's reign on earth.

She placed the Community under the patronage of Michael and all angels, pointing us to a life of worship and active ministry, of mingled adoration and action.

Today, we celebrate Michael, and all angels. Michael, the chief of the archangels (Jude 9), is often portrayed in statues holding down the head of the dragon/serpent/Satan with a sword. The inspiration for this is the reading from Revelation 12: 7, 'war broke out in heaven'. Michael and his angels were fighting against the dragon and its angels. The dragon and its angels lost the battle and were thrown out of heaven to earth. Some icons also portray Michael in this way, but in the icon above we have a different story or image being presented. Michael is holding an orb—holding the whole world as it evolves and grows in unity and harmony. A world where truth, peace, love and justice reign.

Michael means 'Who is like God?' a question that alerts us to the mystery that is beyond imaging, the mystery of the being of God. There is no one, nor any angel like God, except God. Michael upheld this truth and would challenge us today to live in this truth.

In the Scriptures we meet other angels, traditionally called archangels: Gabriel (which means guiding strength of God or wisdom of God) interprets Daniel's dreams or visions for him (Daniel 8:16-17). In Luke 1: 19, 26, Gabriel is the angel of annunciation, bringing news to Zechariah of the birth of John the Baptist and to Mary of the birth of Jesus. In the Book of Tobit,

found in the Apocrypha, sometimes included in the Bible, Raphael is the companion, guide and protector of Tobias, son of Tobit, during his journey. On their return Raphael restores Tobit's eyesight, bringing the healing power of God, which his name means, to Tobit. Each of the angel's names end in 'el' which refers to God and the beginning of their name notes their particular attribute of God which they bring to those to whom they were sent by God.

In the Scriptures there are nearly 300 references to angels from Genesis right through to Revelation. The word angel derives from the Greek word 'angelos' It is a translation of a Hebrew word meaning 'messenger'. In many of the references it is this messenger action and responsibility – being a messenger of or from God to a person, doing the will of God in the world that is seen. In Genesis 28: 12 Jacob, in his dream, sees God's angels ascending and descending a ladder between earth and heaven. He wakes and knows that God is in the place where God is. In today's reading from the Gospel of John we have Jesus promising Nathanael, '...you will see heaven open and God's angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man.' A message of God's presence everywhere and with every one?

There are two significant times when Jesus was helped by angels. Angels came and ministered to him after the temptations, when he was exhausted (Matthew 4:11). Again, in Luke 22:43, an angel came to Jesus to strengthen him during his time in the garden of Gethsemane. Is this an indication that God provides angels who help us in times of need?

Other references are to angels worshipping and giving praise to God. To mention one, from Revelation 5: 11-13. 'As I looked, I heard the voices of lots of angels around the throne and the voices of the living creatures and of

the elders... Then I heard all beings in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea offer praise. Together, all of them were saying, "Praise, honour, glory and strength for ever and ever to the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!" Are we counted among those who give praise and worship to God?

As we reflect on and celebrate Michael and all angels, may we recognise the challenge to be people of praise and worship of God and people of truth, peace, love and justice bringing through our life and actions unity and harmony in the world. Amen.

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