

Saints and Guardian Angels

Throughout Christian history, many saints have also testified to the powerful protection and loving guidance of their own guardian angels.

Late in the sixth century, St. Gregory the Great, a pope, theologian, and future Doctor of the Church, served dinner daily to twelve poor people. One day he saw a thirteenth guest — a beggar who was actually an angel who had visited once before. The angel told Gregory that, because of his charity, “God has given you the Chair of St. Peter and sent me to be your guardian as long as you remain in this world.” Then, the angel disappeared.

In a little village in France in 1425, a thirteen-year-old peasant girl, St. Joan of Arc, began having visions of St. Michael the Archangel and several other saints. The archangel began preparing this humble but prayerful girl to lead French armies in turning back an English invasion. She also helped the heir to the French throne to become king. However, Joan was captured by the English, tried for heresy and witchcraft, and finally burned at the stake.



Joan admitted hearing heavenly voices and seeing angels and saints. “I saw them with my bodily eyes as clearly as I see you,” she admitted. “And when they departed, I used to weep and wish they would take me with them.” Joan was later exonerated and named the patron saint of France.

Modern Angels

In the last several centuries, there have been various reports of angelic intervention or help.

Late in the nineteenth century, an Italian girl named Gemma Galgani was left to care for her younger siblings when her parents died. Despite great responsibilities, Gemma made time for prayer. She also had daily conversations with her guardian angel and often

sent the angel on errands, including the delivery of her letters to her confessor in Rome. The priest there confirmed that he’d find Gemma’s letters on his desk though no one witnessed their arrival. Gemma died young, was canonized, and is considered a mystic. She also received the stigmata, the wounds of Christ

Pope St. John XXIII (1881-1963) always graciously welcomed visiting bishops. Once, when a new bishop confessed his trouble sleeping from the new job, Pope John confessed that he’d also suffered from insomnia when he first became pope. “One day my guardian angel appeared to me in a daydream and whispered, ‘Giovanni, don’t take yourself so seriously!’ Ever since,” Pope John said as he smiled, “I’ve been able to sleep.”



Pope John, who had a life-long devotion to angels and whose given name was Angelo (“Angel”), also told Vatican diplomats that it was his guardian angel who inspired him to call the Second Vatican Council. That great Church council modernized and renewed the Church.

From the infancy of the Church, there’s never been a time when Catholics have not been encouraged to trust in the glorious creatures assigned to protect them. Over and over, popes, saints, theologians, and ordinary believers have assured us that the beautiful and ancient promise of Psalm 91 is meant for every age and every person.

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Are Guardian Angels Real?

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“For he commands his angels with regard to you, to guard you wherever you go. With their hands they shall support you, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

— PSALM 91:11-12

“The angels must have been watching!” Did you ever hear someone say that? According to a 2016 Gallup poll, 72 percent of Americans polled say they believe in angels. In fact, even people who never attend church said they believe in the existence and intervention of angels in our lives.

Since the first Christian centuries, the Church has taught that belief in angels makes perfect sense. The Bible is full of angel references. In some editions of the Bible, angels are mentioned 273 times — 108 references in the Old Testament and 165 in the New Testament. And Jesus himself often talked about the role of angels. “See that you do not despise one of these little ones,” he said, “for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father” (Mt 18:10). Jesus was explaining that God values each human being so much that he assigns a magnificent angel to each one.



What the Church Teaches about Believing in Angels

“The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls ‘angels’ is a truth of faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 328).

God’s Messengers

The word “angel” derives from the Greek word *angelos*, which means “one sent,” or “messenger.” In Scripture, God often sends his angels into the world with a message — either for an individual or for the whole world.

On the night that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds to share the

good news. “For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord,” the angel told terrified shepherds (Lk 2:11). Then, hosts of angels — meaning countless numbers of angels — appeared, filling the skies with their joyful praise of God.

In a way, guardian angels are also sent to every human being with a message. The message is that each one of us is precious to God; we’re made in his image. We believe that angels know and understand this. Though we may ignore or tune them out, guardian angels are constantly whispering in our ears: “God loves you! You are God’s beloved child!” This message is part of the way they protect and inspire us.

A Guardian Angel’s Role

What does a guardian angel really do? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a simple but full explanation in reference to angels. “From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession” (336). St. Augustine of Hippo said that angels who guard us are as close to us as our shadows. Augustine explained, “If we journey into another country, they follow us; go where we will by land or by sea, they are ever with us all day long and all night long, and during every moment of our life.”

There was a time when pictures of guardian angels guiding children across a bridge or away from a cliff were commonly found in Catholic homes and schools. These pictures were comforting. However, they illustrated only part of Catholic teaching about the role of guardian angels.

Our guardian angels aren’t assigned by God just to protect us from physical harm — or even death. Sometimes

Guardian Angel Prayer

Angel of God, my Guardian dear,
To whom God’s love commits me here,
Ever this day be at my side,
To light and guard, to rule and guide.
Amen.



angels do protect us in that way. But, these invisible protectors are primarily concerned with saving us from spiritual harm. Their influence on our minds and hearts is subtle, gentle. They respect our freedom. The primary concern of our guardian angels is keeping us on a path that leads us to God. That is why, as St. Augustine put it, they stay as close to us as our shadows.

For thousands of years, the Church has also maintained that God also sends his angels to guard cities, nations, churches, and sacred places. In the Old Testament, St. Michael the Archangel was the special

Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all evil spirits who prowl through the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.



protector of Israel. In 1886, Pope Leo XIII composed the Prayer to St. Michael to ask for Michael’s protection of the Church and all believers. The pope reportedly had a terrifying vision about the evils that would take place in the twentieth century. Many people say that prayer daily.

Angels: Pure Spirits

In the Nicene Creed, Catholics affirm belief in God: “maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.” Angels are part of that “invisible” world.

Created by God, like human beings, angels are nonetheless pure spirits. They have intelligence that is second only to God’s. They communicate wordlessly with each other and God — instantaneously. They are radiant when they appear because they reflect God’s light. St. Thomas Aquinas said, “Among other creatures the angels are nearest to God and resemble him most.”

Despite the beautiful way they’ve been depicted in art for centuries, angels don’t really have wings — or bodies. When they appear on earth, they typically adopt a human form so that human beings aren’t scared. In the fourth century, artists began to show angels with wings to explain their instantaneous speed, freedom, and power.

Theologians also tell us that each angel has a unique personality, free will, and the ability to love. At the dawn of creation, angels were created and then given a choice. They could obey or rebel against God. Because of pride, many angels rebelled and followed Satan, becoming “fallen angels” or devils.

Pope Francis on Guardian Angels

In a recent homily, Pope Francis encouraged belief in guardian angels. He said, “We all have an angel with us, who guards us, who makes us hear things.” He continued, “We have often heard: ‘I should do this this way ... this is not good, be careful!’ [This is] the voice of our travel companion.... No one walks alone, and none of us can think he is alone: this companion is always there.”

