September 29th: Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, archangels

Gospel text (*Jn* 1:47-51): Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him.” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” And he said to him, “Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

“You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man”

Cardinal Jorge MEJÍA Archivist and Librarian of Holy Roman Church

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Today, in the Feast of the Saints Archangels, Jesus manifests to his Apostles and to everyone else, the presence of his angels and their relationship with Him. They are in the Lord's celestial glory, where they eternally exalt the Son of man, who is the Son of God. They surround Him and are at His service.

This “ascending and descending” reminds us of the episode of the Patriarch Jacob, who on his trip to Mesopotamia, the dwelling land of his ancestors, slept over a stone and had the vision of the angels “descending and ascending” by a mysterious ladder which reached from earth to heaven, and of Yahweh renewing to him the glorious promises which He had made to Abraham and Isaac. We should notice the relationship between the Divine communication and the active presence of the angels.

Thus, Gabriel, Michael and Raphael appear in the Bible as present in earthly events and, as Saint Gregory the Great tells us, bringing to men messages which will decisively change our lives through their presence and their very actions. They are precisely named “archangels”, that is, princes of the angels, because they are sent on the greatest missions.

Gabriel is sent to announce to the Blessed Virgin Mary the virginal conception of the Son of God (cf. Lk 1:28-30). Michael fights against the rebel angels who are cast out from Heaven (cf. Rev 12). He announces, thus, the mystery of His Divine justice, which is also exerted against those rebelling angels, while assuring us of His victory —and ours too— over Evil. Raphael accompanies the young Tobias, protects and advises

him, and, finally, heals his father (cf. Tob). This way, we are told of the presence of angels beside each one of us: the angel we name the Guardian Angel.

Let us learn from this celebration of the archangels “ascending and descending” upon the Son of man, that they serve God, but they serve Him for our sake. They glorify the Holy Trinity, and they do it while serving us. And, consequently, we realize how much devotion we owe them and how grateful we should also be to the Father who sends them for our own good.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "When man becomes truly spiritual and transformed by the divine love that purifies him, he receives the union and the loving illumination of God with a softness similar to that of the angels" (Saint John of the Cross)

- "Fighting is a daily reality in the Christian life: in our heart, in our life, in our family, in our churches... If we don't fight, we will be defeated! Fortunately, the Lord gave this task mainly to the angels: to fight and win" (Francis)

- "Angels have been present since creation and throughout the history of salvation, announcing this salvation from afar or near and serving the accomplishment of the divine plan... led the People of God; announced births and callings; and assisted the prophets... Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Precursor and that of Jesus himself (cf Lk 1:11.26)" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nº 332)