

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Feast of the Guardian Angels; Mass of Discernment

Feast of the Guardian Angels

Mass of Discernment - Bon Secours Sisters Chapter

Marriottsville, Maryland

Oct. 2, 2019

Introduction

In the midst of your Chapter, in the midst of your discernment, we gather to celebrate Holy Mass on the Feast of the Guardian Angels. Ringing in our ears are words from the Book of Exodus, "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you, to guard you along the way..." (23:20). In words taken from Psalm 91 we lifted our voices in song, "For [the LORD] will give his angels charge concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (91:11). Voices from Tradition also well up in our minds and hearts on this day, the voice of St. Basil the Great who taught that "...each member of the faithful has a Guardian Angel to protect, guard, and guide them through life"; or the voice of St. Bernard of Clairvaux who also taught that "these celestial spirits have been placed at our sides to protect, instruct, and guide us." Indeed, "heaven denies us nothing that [will] assist us!"

If that be true, then there are as many invisible members of your chapter as there are visible members! They are here not because they were elected or appointed but rather because God, with love beyond telling, sent them to be among us. They will not vote for new leadership nor will they interfere with your decisions. Nonetheless, they will play three important roles in your deliberations. And what might they be?

Messengers

First, as Scripture attests in so many places, angels function as God's messengers. St. Gregory the Great says that these "holy spirits of heaven...can be...called angels

when they deliver some message" ... some message that God wishes us to receive. Most famous among the angels is Gabriel who brought to Mary the astounding news that she was to be the Mother of the Savior and the Mother of a redeemed humanity. Daily we repeat Gabriel's greeting to Mary because that message signaled the dawning of "a future full of hope" (Jer. 29:11).

Perhaps our angels are not as famous as Gabriel nor even as famous as the angel Clarence in Frank Capra's movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*. Nonetheless, our angels are attending us, just as surely as they attended Jesus, and they are delivering to your minds and hearts a message from God, a message of audacious hope, hope that is charged with the boldness of the Gospel... the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus, handed on by the Apostles, probed by the Church's Doctors, and lived by saints more numerous than the grains of sand on the seashore. May these angels, these "holy spirits" successfully deliver that message of hope that comes to us from the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life.

Expressions of Human Dignity

If angels are messengers of hope, so too our guardian angels are expressions of that inviolable dignity with which God has endowed each and every person at every stage of life. This, too, is a message of hope, in the eyes of the world, an audacious hope. If God did not think much of us, if we were out of sight and out of mind, would God have sent us these "guardians and trustees", as St. Bernard calls them? The very fact that these angels accompany us throughout our lives, prompting us to encounter the Lord in love, prompting us to cherish one another's life and dignity - this very fact should fill our hearts with gratitude and joy. The words of Psalm 8 and the Letter to the Hebrews (2:7) come to mind: "...you made [us] a little lower than the angels and crowned [us] with glory & honor." God is so mindful of the human beings he has created in the divine image, an image that has been rescued from sin and restored in the luster of God's glory by the redeeming love of the Savior and by the overshadowing of the Spirit.

Reflecting for a moment on our angels as expressions of our human dignity and as a constant call to friendship with the Lord and to discipleship, ... are we not reminded in a powerful way of the human dignity of those we serve? ... the sick, the poor and

vulnerable, the immigrant, those seemingly without hope... To those who “dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79) – we, in our turn – are sent as messengers, as messengers of hope, as defenders of human dignity, as protagonists in the struggle to attain what Pope Francis calls “integral human ecology”.

Protectors

Finally, angels are our protectors, as Scripture and Tradition attest with one voice. But what really does that mean? How do they protect us? Do they prevent illnesses or accidents or even calamities? While, in certain cases such individualized protection cannot be ruled out, nonetheless accidents and tragedies take place each day, to our great regret. So the question arises, what kind of protectors are these angels?

It could be said that our angels are sent to us, neither to absolve us from making prudent decisions nor to shield us from those crucibles of suffering by which we share in the Cross of Christ, as every true disciple inevitably does. Rather, our angels are sent to guide us along the way to eternal salvation, to guide our pilgrim steps through this world so that we might follow in the footsteps of Christ, veering neither to the right nor the left but straightaway towards the Kingdom. I sometimes think that my poor angel has to function something like a border collie, helping the Good Shepherd to keep me on course, indeed to keep me striving “to enter through the narrow gate”, as Jesus urges us to do in St. Luke’s Gospel (13:24). In your consecrated lives you are living signs of that which we hope for, and it is the task of your angels to help you be that beacon of hope, as individual members of Bon Secours and as a religious community.

Conclusion

May the Spirit of the Lord be upon you as you proceed through your Chapter, even as our celestial spirits prompt us to open our hearts to the hope that is ours in Christ and to the love of the Holy Spirit. May God bless you and keep you always in his love!