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OUR GUARDIAN ANGELS



HERE is a spirit world around us, more populous, more powerful, far more resourceful, than our own visible world, of human beings. Spirits, good and evil, thread their way in our midst. With unimagined speed and noiseless flight they pass from place to place. They inhabit the spaces of the air about us. Some we know to be solicitous for our welfare, others are intent on our harm. We are the immediate center of all their plans.

The number of evil spirits here on earth we have no way of ascertaining. "My name is legion, for we are many," the unclean spirit said to Christ when He drove it out of the man in the country of the Gerasens. But the good spirits here with us, we know, are actually more numerous than all men living. For each human being has its personal Guardian Angel, and the Scripture teaches us that this is not the only ministry for which God sends His angels.

The very word "Angel" means "one who is sent," a "messenger." And St. Paul expressly states that the specific mission of the angels is to minister to men who have not yet attained the Heavenly Kingdom: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?" (Hebr. i, 14). Yet these angels are of a higher order than we and by nature far more wonderfully endowed.

Spirits of Light and of Darkness

Of the interweaving activities of the evil spirits and the good here below we have a remarkable illustration at the very opening of Our Lord's public life. The same incidents

also afford us a striking proof of the existence of Angel Guardians, unintentionally supplied by the devil in person.

"Then Jesus," the Scripture says, "was led by the spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil" (Matt. iv, 1). But the Tempter, who had as yet no certainty of the Divinity of Christ, did not begin his attacks at once. He first drew up his plans and awaited his time. The favorable moment, he believed, had come when Christ was weak and hungry after His long fast, and he opened his campaign with a temptation to sensuality. But no sooner did Christ answer him with a text from Scripture than Satan immediately changed his own tactics. For his methods, as someone wisely remarked, are to come in at our way and go out by his. He therefore opened his next temptation by also quoting a text from the Sacred Scriptures. Taking Christ up into the holy city and setting Him upon the pinnacle of the Temple, he said to him:

"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written that: *He hath given his angels charge over thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest perhaps thou dash thy foot against a stone*" (Matt. iv, 6).

The words italicized are quoted by the devil from Psalm xc. (11, 12). The writer, who was David, there speaks of the assured protection which God gives to all those who religiously confide in Him. He will not merely overshadow them with His shoulders and compass them about with His shield, that no evil may befall them, but He will also send His angels to guard them. In a particular way this promise of God was to be fulfilled in the future Messiah. As found in the afore-mentioned Psalm the text reads:

"For he hath given his angels charge over thee,
To keep thee in all thy ways.
In their hands they shall bear thee up,
Lest perchance thou dash thy foot against a stone."

Now we know that from the pinnacle of the Temple, where Satan had set Christ, there was a regular stairway leading down, which Our Lord could use. By casting Himself, therefore, in a spectacular way from that height Jesus would merely have tempted Providence. We have no right to invoke miracles when natural means are at hand.

But in citing that text Satan overshot his mark. He merely made doubly strong our argument for the existence of the Angel Guardians. By the very freedom with which he quoted the text, and by the manner in which he applied it, the devil showed he was entirely certain that Christ acknowledged the existence of Guardian Angels. Nor did Our Lord for a moment contradict this assumption.

Much more, the very words of this text may be said to have been almost literally fulfilled when, after a third temptation, Satan was ordered to be gone, and immediately we read: "Then the devil left him: and behold, angels came and ministered to him" (Matt. iv, 11). We have here, in God's own way, the verification of that extraordinary angelic assistance to which the Psalmist referred. Who of us that has practiced true devotion to his Guardian Angel has not had moments when that heavenly spirit's aid was almost tangibly evident to him?

How precisely the angels, at this moment, ministered to Christ in the desert, whether visibly or invisibly; whether with the actual ministration of material food, as in the case of Elias, or whether with purely spiritual consolations, we cannot say.

There is a picture in the Museum of the Louvre, from the brush of Lebrun, which represents this scene as the artist ought to visualize it for us. Resting at the foot of a tree, after His long forty days of fasting and His sharp encounter with the devil, Christ gazes to heaven with a look of prayerful gratitude and affection. About Him and in the air above are ministering spirits of light. In vessels of

exquisite beauty, befitting the service of their King, they bring Him viands and drink, while with reverent gestures they offer Him their love and adoration.

“Their Angels in Heaven”

But for proof of the existence of the Guardian Angels we are by no means confined to the words of David, and to the further evidence which Satan’s citation of them supplies. We have Christ’s own positive doctrine upon this subject.

“See,” He warned His disciples, “that you despise not one of those little ones, for I say to you that *their angels* in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. xviii, 10).

Their angels, He said, implying evidently that each of these children had its own Guardian Angel assigned to it. The least then that we must conclude from this passage is that it gives us Divine assurance, in a general way, of the existence of Guardian Angels. The truth that these spirits never lose sight of the Beatific Vision, while fulfilling their mission here upon earth, is what Our Savior implies by the statement that their angels in Heaven always see the face of His Father. Namely, they carry Heaven about with them, which consists above all things in that Beatific Vision from which they are never separated, even as the evil spirits upon earth carry about with them their own punishment.

But regarding the more complete interpretation of Our Divine Lord’s words concerning the Angel Guardians more shall be said further on. Let us here return once more to the testimony given by Satan himself.

When the devil, to his undoing, quoted Scripture, and quoted it correctly, he not merely showed that he had not the slightest doubt regarding Our Lord’s own belief in the Guardian Angels, but he also showed that this belief must have been accepted by all the faithful Jews of the time.

He spoke of the doctrine of the Guardian Angels as confidently before Our Lord as he might speak of Christ's doctrine of the Eucharist before an ecumenical Council, knowing that there was no question of his statement being challenged. There were, it is true, even then rationalistic Jews who denied the very existence of angels, but their denials merely proved the faith of the orthodox in these spiritual beings whom God sends to minister to us here on earth. The Scriptures are filled with references to them.

Belief of Early Christians

We remember the incident of the little servant maid Rhode in the house of Mark's mother, referred to in the Acts of the Apostles. The first Christians had been gathered together there until late in the night, praying for Peter, whom Herod had cast into prison. Suddenly there was a knocking at the gate, and when Rhode hurried to find who the visitor seeking admission at the untimely hour might be, she recognized at once the voice of Peter. Forgetting in her joy to open the door, she left him standing out in the night, while she announced to the assembled Christians that it was Peter, Peter himself, who stood without.

"Thou art mad!" they told her, for they knew—as they thought—that he was lying bound in Herod's prison, chained to two soldiers, with no human possibility of escape. But when she still insisted that it was Peter's own voice she had heard, they all agreed: "*It is his angel*" (Acts xii, 16).

Now it was Peter himself, indeed, whom an Angel had freed from prison and led into the city by night. But the readiness and unanimity with which this entire Christian assembly at once concluded, without any hesitation, that it must be his Guardian Angel, gives the most convincing proof possible of the belief of the early Christian Church, and therefore of the Apostles from whom they received their doctrine, in the truth of the existence of Guardian Angels.

“It was my Guardian Angel who saved me!” Catholics quite naturally exclaim on escaping from an incredible danger, when there was not time even, it may be, to have thought of prayer. In precisely the same way those Apostolic Christians exclaimed, by an impulse which evidently was as natural to them as to us, “It is his angel!” Volumes of learned argument could not be as convincing and irrefutable. The liberation itself of Peter from prison was but another illustration of that extraordinary assistance of the angels to which the Psalmist referred in the passage cited by Satan. While still in Herod’s power, “bound with two chains,” a light had suddenly filled Peter’s cell and the Angel of God appeared, touching him on his side. The fetters fell from his wrists, and obeying the Angel he rose, girded and sandled himself, and so followed his guide, past the guards and out into the city of Jerusalem. Only when arrived there, in one of the city streets, the Angel left him. The invisible assistance of his Angel Guardian now sufficed.

Tobias and Sara

But the classic instance of the gracious guardianship of the angels is that which the Scripture offers us in the Book of Tobias, and which the Church constantly uses to illustrate the many services performed for us by our own Guardian Angels. It also affords us an excellent example of the interplay of good and evil spirits.

In the city of Nineve, of the Assyrians, the blinded Tobias had earnestly besought God in his woes. At precisely the same time, in Rages, a city of the Medes, a Jewish maiden named Sara stormed the gates of Heaven with her supplications, spending three days and nights, without eating or drinking, but praying that she might be freed from a terrible disgrace. She was afflicted by an evil spirit who

had killed in turn each of the young men who had won her hand. God, the Scripture informs us, had allowed this to befall them because of the lustful manner in which they approached holy matrimony, banishing God from their thoughts and hearts.

"Thy counsel," she beautifully prayed to the Almighty, "is not in man's power, but this everyone is sure of that worshippeth thee, that his life, if it be under trial shall be crowned: and if it be under tribulation shall be delivered: and if it be under correction, it shall be allowed to come to thy mercy. For thou art not delighted in our being lost: because after a storm thou makest calm, and after tears and weeping thou pourest in joyfulness" (Tob. iii, 20-22).

And so, at one and the same time, God heard the prayers of both these holy souls and sent His Angel Raphael "to heal them both." It was therefore no chance thought which came to the mind of the blind Tobias, who believed his end was near, that he should send his son, the young Tobias—named after him—to collect a debt outstanding in that same country of the Medes where Sara dwelled. So, by the intervention of God's Angel, Sara and Tobias were to meet. Of the marriages arranged in Heaven, this certainly was one.

Tobias and the Angel Raphael

But let us now follow some of these events.

Bent on doing his father's bidding, the young Tobias went out to find a reliable companion for his journey. He had not far to seek, for almost at once he chanced, as it seemed, upon "a beautiful young man, standing girded, and as it were ready to walk." Not only did the young man know the entire way to the very house for which Tobias was bound, but he had been in that house itself. "I will lead thy son safe," he promised the father who made most

sedulous inquiry, "and bring him to thee again safe." Little did the good man realize how literally the prayer which he made as he blessed his son was to be fulfilled: "May you have a good journey, and God be with you in your way, *and his angel accompany you.*"

In the galleries of the New York Public Library there is a large picture representing Tobias and the Angel. It was painted by Andrea del Sarto and is probably the most valuable of all the pictures there displayed. Through all these centuries the unusual richness of the colors has been marvelously preserved. A look of tender graciousness is on the face of the Angel and his figure is of that strong and splendid type, with that dignity and serene power, which modern artists cannot remotely reach.

At his side, clad in the costume of the painter's day, is the young Tobias, his right hand confidently laid in the hand of his guide. Earnestly gazing up into the Angel's face he declares to him his gratitude. In his left hand we behold the fish whose "monstrous" size the artist greatly reduced to introduce him fittingly into the picture, while the little dog, too, is present with the full realization of his importance in this scene.

The heart and liver of the fish, Tobias was instructed, were to be used for driving away the devil; the gall, for restoring sight to the blind father. In themselves the former could surely have had no such power, but like the spittle and clay used by Our Lord they were to be applied as an outward ceremony, while the effect would be produced by the Omnipotence of God. Not only could the demon, who had proved so formidable to those who neglected God, do no harm to Tobias, but he was overpowered and rendered completely helpless by Raphael. A similar power our Angel Guardians, too, can exercise over the evil spirits who quail before them.

What We Owe Our Angel Guardian

Tobias, on his safe and happy return, with Sara for his wedded wife, thus briefly recounted what his unknown Angel guide had done for him:

“He conducted me and brought me safe again, he received the money of Gabelus [the loan Tobias had been sent to collect], he caused me to have my wife, and he chased from her the evil spirit, he gave joy to her parents, myself he delivered from being devoured by the fish, thee also he hath made to see the light of heaven, *and we are filled with all good things through him.* What can we give him sufficient for these things?”

Surely a most notable list of favors received. But who can write the list of all the things that we ourselves owe to our own Guardian Angel? Have we ever asked ourselves what we can give him “sufficient for these things.” St. Bernard beautifully explains that we owe him reverence as a heavenly messenger sent to us: we owe him devotion for all his good deeds done to us; and we owe him confidence for his constant and watchful guardianship of us in all our ways.

But above all we must show our love of him by implicit obedience. It was this obedience which saved Tobias and won all God’s favors for him. Proceeding entirely under the Angel’s guidance he entered matrimony, as he called God to witness, “only for the love of posterity, in which thy name may be blessed for ever and ever.” And Sara with wifely fidelity prayed, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, and let us grow old both together in health.” Such was the marriage contracted in Heaven’s sight under angelic guidance.

That extraordinary guardianship of the angels, which we have followed here in some detail, and their power of aiding men to overcome all the elements of evil, even under

most extreme and apparently impossible conditions, we find illustrated again and again in the Holy Books. Let me here refer to but one other example, that of Judith.

Judith and Her Angel Protector

No sooner had this heroine of the people of God returned safely from her perilous adventure undertaken in the very camp of the enemy, where she had beheaded with his own sword their leader Holofernes, than she hastened at once to make public her gratitude to God and to His Angel. The latter, as she assured her countrymen, had guarded her at every step:

“As the Lord liveth, *his angel hath been my keeper*, both going hence, and abiding there, and returning from thence hither: and the Lord hath not suffered me his handmaid to be defiled, but hath brought me back to you without pollution of sin, rejoicing for his victory, for my escape, and for your deliverance” (Judith xiii, 20).

Regarding the existence, *in general*, of Guardian Angels sent by God to the assistance of men here upon earth, there can therefore be no doubt. This truth is clear from the Sacred Scriptures and must be accepted as of Divine Faith. To deny it would be to exclude one's self from the fold of God's Church.

An Angel Guardian for Every Man

But Catholic belief, as we know, does not rest here. It goes further and asserts as of absolute certainty that every human being has a Guardian Angel. This is not defined as a Dogma by the Church, nor is that necessary for it to be believed by us as entirely true and certain. It is part of our Catholic teaching. But in order more accurately to specify this teaching some distinction is made here.

In the first place we say that every *just* man has a Guardian Angel. This truth is such that it cannot be denied

by anyone without incurring the guilt of inexcusable rashness. All the Fathers and theologians agree that everyone in the state of grace has a Guardian Angel. It is to the just man that the words of the Psalmist, I have previously quoted, expressly refer: "He hath given his angels charge over thee."

In the next place it is a universal Catholic belief that not merely every *just* man, every child of grace, but in fact *every single human being* here upon earth, whether Christian or non-Christian, whether in grace or in sin, remains during its entire life under the care of a Guardian Angel. This belief we simply describe as absolutely certain.

"I hold that not the just only," Suarez wrote, "but even sinners; not the Faithful only, but the unfaithful; not the baptized only, but the unbaptized, have Angel Guardians." The Catholic belief could not be more completely stated. Christian, Jew, or infidel, each has a Guardian Angel. Moreover, it is generally held that each human being has its own distinct Guardian Angel, not assigned to anyone else.

Words of Christ on Guardian Angels

Let us turn back once more, then, to the words of Our Divine Lord and observe what bearing they have upon this conclusion.

"See that you dispise not one of these little ones," He solemnly warned His disciples, "for I say to you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."

The children then gathered about Him were doubtless all of Jewish nationality. Yet there is no reason for saying that Jewish children alone were favored with Guardian Angels. The purpose of Our Lord's warning, as He had previously stated, was that no one should dare to scandalize the little ones. The reason He gave was the dignity of

these children, whom Almighty God esteems so much that to each one a Guardian Angel is assigned who looks upon the face of the Infinite Creator. Now, the mandate of Our Lord, that we should not scandalize little children, is universal. It applied to Greek and Roman, as well as to Jewish children in Our Lord's day. It applies to Christian and non-Christian in our own time. Therefore, the reason Christ assigns for His commandment must also hold universally for all children, of all nations, and of all times, namely that they *all* have Angel Guardians who look upon the face of Our Father who is in Heaven.

The pagan world of Our Lord's day utterly ignored the dignity of the child. The Jews evidently also needed a lesson on this point. Jesus shows them the value to be set upon even the smallest of these children. They are under the guardianship of their angels, and these look upon God.

But it is nowhere said that as these little ones grow up to the full stature of men and women their Guardian Angels leave them. There was indeed a special reason to call attention to the Guardian Angels of the children in particular, lest because of their very littleness and helplessness, men might "despise" them, as the pagans did. Yet as these children attain to maturity they still have the utmost need of angelic assistance against the invisible foes who beset them, against the concupiscence that waxes strong within them, and against the many perils of body and soul that surround them.

Delivering Us from Evil

A beautiful example of the constant activity of our guardian spirits in protecting us from evil throughout our life is that given in the case of Jacob, as recorded in Holy Scripture. Placing a hand on the head of each of the two sons of Joseph, who had been brought to him, the venerable Patriarch said: "The Angel *that delivereth me from all evil.*

bless these boys" (Gen. xl, 16). What is this but another way of calling him his "Guardian Angel"? The same thought was expressed in still more vivid words when the Psalmist sang: "The angel of the Lord shall camp round about them that fear Him, and shall deliver them" (Psalm xxxiii, 8).

It is to the true servants of God that David refers in this last text. But even should men fall into grievous sin, even should they live in heresy and unbelief, sufficient grace for salvation will always be granted them. And such a grace, precisely, is the continued aid, counsel and solitude of their Guardian Angels. Naturally the more obedient men are to these, and the more perfectly they allow themselves to be led by them in the way of God, the more ready, too, will their guardian spirits be to stand by their side and deliver them from harm.

Raphael forcibly restrained the evil spirit from hurting Tobias, but the very same demon had been permitted to kill those others of whom the Scripture tells us that they had "shut out God from themselves, and from their mind" in entering upon holy matrimony. Yet it does not follow that in their cases, too, their own Angel Guardians had not long sought to warn and save them, before they were finally left to the power of the evil spirit. The devil is ever active killing souls, and often succeeds also in ruining the bodies of men. He is a "murderer" from the beginning.

Guardian Angel Will Not Desert Us

Yet while life lasts the Angel Guardian will not desert his charge. There are passages in the Fathers, it is true, which may seem to affirm the contrary. But these are not to be taken too literally. We ourselves often speak of the Angel Guardian as turning away from a soul at the commission of a sin, but we do not mean to imply that he has totally left it. So also we must interpret the Fathers.

On the other hand we realize how intimate the delightful relations between the faithful soul and its guardian spirit may become. The affection beaming from the face of Raphael, as depicted by Andrea del Sarto, may give us some faint hint of the love our Guardian Angels have for us if we listen to their suggestions and obey them in the spirit of Tobias. The relation thus begun upon earth will be but the beginning of an everlasting friendship whose happy fruition we shall enjoy in the Kingdom of our Father.

The Angel Guardian of Israel

A passage of particular charm in the Old Testament, which the Church constantly applies to our own Guardian Angel, is that wherein a special Angel was promised to Israel. In their journey through the desert the children of God were to be led safely by him to the Promised Land, provided only that they would be faithful to him and heed his voice. At once we are reminded of our own Angel Guardian deputed by God to bring us in equal safety to our own heavenly country. The words of Scripture here are as strong as they are beautiful:

“Behold I will send my angel, who shall go before thee, and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared. Take notice of him and hear his voice, and do not think him one to be contemned; for he will not forgive when thou hast sinned, and my name is in him.

“But if thou wilt hear his voice, and do all that I speak, I will be an enemy to thy enemies, and will afflict them that afflict thee. And my angel shall go before thee” (Exod. xxiii, 20-23).

It was this very Angel, as commentators state without any hesitation, who in the later days of Moses stood in the way of Balaam with a drawn sword, when that Prophet had been called by King Balac solemnly to pronounce a curse

upon the people of Israel. It is but another signal lesson which should drive home in a telling manner the protecting care of our Guardian Angels.

Balaam and the Angel

The Angel, in this instance, first made himself visible to the beast of burden on which Balaam rode. Twice it turned aside, as it saw him in its way; the third time, when it could not evade him, it sank down before him. But when Balaam beat its side, the Lord opened the mouth of the animal that it might utter articulate words. Only after that did the Lord also open the eyes of the Prophet himself that he too might see "the angel standing in the way with a drawn sword."

"I have sinned," he cried. But the Angel permitted him to go on his journey, contenting himself with the admonition: "See thou speak no other thing than what I shall command thee." He had been called to curse the people of God, but by the command of the Angel whom the Lord had sent to go before them, he might only bless them. "Who can count the dust of Jacob," said the Prophet before King Balac, "and know the number of the stock of Jacob" (Num. xxiii, 10).

Catechism of Council of Trent

To come now to the Catholic doctrine on this subject as authoritatively taught in the Church, we shall find this briefly and beautiful set forth in the Catechism of the Council of Trent. In the first place we have here the clear assurance that every human being is in the charge of a Guardian Angel. The Catechism says:

"To angels is committed by the Providence of God the office to guard the human race, and to be ready at hand with every man to protect him from any serious harm."

The Catechism then explains the nature of this protective care:

“For as parents, if their children have occasion to travel a dangerous way, infested by robbers, appoint persons to guard and assist them in case of attack, so does our heavenly Father place over each of us, in this our journey towards our heavenly country, angels to protect us by their aid and watchfulness, that we may escape the snares secretly laid for us by our enemies, repel their horrible attacks on us, and proceed on our journey along the road that leads directly to our end. By their guidance we are saved from the devious wanderings into which our treacherous foe might betray us, to lead us aside from the way that leads to Heaven.

“The functions and administration of this special care and Providence of God over men are entrusted to angels, whose nature occupies an intermediate place between God and men.”

The Catechism of Trent then calls attention to the wonderful examples of angelic guardianship which we find in the Sacred Scripture and adds: “So we are given to understand that innumerable similarly important services are rendered us invisibly by angels, the guardians of our safety and salvation.” And in this connection it recalls what the Angel Raphael did for Tobias. So we are taught to understand the manifold good offices we may expect from our own Guardian Angel.

Angelic Teachers and Consolers

One of the most striking pictures of the Guardian Angel is that which we owe to the great Spanish painter Velasquez. He shows us Our Lord sunk to the earth at the pillar of the scourging, with the instruments of torture still lying around. An Angel Guardian has brought his little charge to condole

with the Savior in His agony. In its white garments, symbolic of innocence, the child is kneeling close to Him. Its hands are folded and it gazes into the face of the suffering Christ with a look of ineffable pity and love. Meanwhile the Angel points his finger, teaching it the lessons it should learn and the resolutions its little heart should form for life. That heart overflows with reverence and affection. The look of the afflicted Christ sinks deep into the depths of it. So we all are to be little children at the hands of our Guardian Angels.

But in our own afflictions, too, those Angels are close to us, whispering hope, teaching patience and resignation, filling us with faith in the ultimate good which God will bring out of our afflictions if we but bear them lovingly in union with Him.

And here comes to mind a painting less well-known and greatly different in tone and concept from those of the old Catholic masters, but containing a true and noble thought. It is the "Mater Dolorosa," by August Roth.

Our Lady is seated with the Savior's crown of thorns upon her lap. Her head is held erect in her great sorrow, her eyes look straight before her. To her right is an angel, speaking words of consolation and lifting his hand towards heaven. To the left, midmost in a group of angels, is one garbed in black, but with wings extended and eyes raised upward to that same source whence true comfort flows. Both in the desert and in the Garden of Olives Our Lord was sustained by the angels, and we can understand how Our Lady too must have had special assistance from them in her great sorrow. Why then should not we also hope to receive from them help, strength and new joy in our trials, loneliness and grief? Seldom, surely, are they more near to us than then.

"When thou didst pray with tears," the Angel Raphael said to the elder Tobias, "I offered thy prayers to the

Lord" (Tob. xii, 12). Trials must come, "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptations should prove thee." It is not the function of the Angel Guardian to avert all trials, but to help us to overcome them. Perhaps he may turn from us entirely such as might be to our harm.

Guardian Angels in Secular Poetry

But in particular we have need of angelic assistance in our battles against the powers of darkness. This is so clear that even under Protestantism it could not be overlooked. The poet Edmund Spenser waxes eloquent as he described the invisible aid given us by God's celestial messengers:

"How oft do they their silver bowers leave,
And come to succor us that succor want!
How oft do they with golden pinions cleave
The flitting skies, like flying pursuivant,
Against foul fiends to aid us militant!
They for us fight, they watch and duly ward,
And their bright squadrons round about us plant—
And all for love, and nothing for reward.
O, why should heavenly God to men have such regard?"

Even the ancient pagans may well enough have retained something of the original tradition regarding the angelic aid which God accords to human beings. A reflection of this tradition is possibly contained in a remarkable passage from one of the earliest Greek poems, the "Work and Days" of Hesiod, which is quoted by Father Raphael V. O'Connell, S.J., in his valuable little book, "The Holy Angels." The pagan poet wrote:

“Upon the thickly-peopled earth,
In ever ceaseless flow,
Full thrice ten thousand deathless beings
Pass lightly to and fro.

“Keepers, unseen, of mortal men,
In airy vesture dight,
Their good and evil deeds they scan,
Stern champions of the right.”

Angels Offer Up Our Prayers

A special function of the holy Angels, to which the Scripture calls attention, is the offering up of our prayers to God, enhancing the value of our petitions by uniting their own supplications to them. We have seen how the prayers of the elder Tobias were presented to God by Raphael. In the Apocalypse we are shown a most imposing scene in which we behold the Seven Angels before the Throne, among whom we know that Raphael has his place. Then there appears an eighth angel who offers up the prayers of the saints:

“And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer in his hand, and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense went up with the prayers of the saints, from the angel’s hand, before God” (Apoc. viii, 3, 4).

Making Men’s Angels Our Allies

Realizing, therefore, something of the power and love of these spirits, it must be evident to us that in seeking to do good to any soul we should always enter into league with its Guardian Angel. He is the best and most intimate friend that soul has at its side here upon earth.

The joy of the Angel Guardian on the return to God of the soul in his charge can be adequately understood only when we remember the rejoicing among even his fellow angels in Heaven at the return of one sinner doing penance. "There shall be joy before the angels of God," yea—"more than upon ninety-nine just that need not penance" (Luke xv, 7). What then must be the joy of its own Guardian Angel at the return of that soul which before had belonged to Satan.

So, again, it is a holy custom, most sweet, thoughtful and proper, to call on our Guardian Angel to fly to the assistance of those dear to us that he may comfort or aid them in their needs. We have seen the example of Jacob asking his Angel to bless the two children whose future he had particularly at heart. The distance between us and our loved ones is no obstacle whatsoever to these spirits who can traverse the earth in an instant of time, and who will delight to carry out for us our little services of love.

Ours from Conception to Paradise

Referring now to the time when first its Angel Guardian is appointed for a human being, we often hear it said that his ministry begins with the birth of the child. But this need not be taken too literally. We may say, with the very best of authority and for excellent reasons, that it really begins with the very first moment of human life itself. In the words of St. Ambrose: "Every soul, at the moment it is infused into the body, is entrusted into the keeping of an angel."

That angelic ministration continues through life, but need not end with life. "Assist him, ye Saints of God," the Church prays at the soul's separation from the body. "Come forth to meet him, ye Angels of the Lord, receive his soul and present it in the sight of the Most High."

Surely the Angel Guardian must there play an important rôle.

Accompanied, therefore, by still other angelic spirits, the Angel Guardian bears up to God the soul of the just at its departure from this life. So, for instance, we read in the Sacred Scriptures of the soul of Lazarus "carried by Angels into Abraham's bosom" (Luke xvi, 22).

Should it be consigned to the purging fires of Purgatory the presence of its Guardian Angel is not necessarily excluded even there. Often, perhaps, he may visit and console it, until finally the hour of its release has come. Then, with exultant angels to rejoice with him, he accompanies it in its triumphant entrance into Heaven. "May the angels escort thee to Paradise," sings the Church as the body is borne to its consecrated resting place, while the soul has already been judged by God. "At thy coming may the martyrs welcome thee, and conduct thee to the holy city Jerusalem. May a Choir of Angels receive thee, and with Lazarus, once poor, mayest thou have rest everlasting."

With Us Forever in Glory

In his "Dream of Gerontius," Cardinal Newman, whose poetry is redolent with angelic presences, describes the brief instant that is supposed by him to pass between the separation of the soul from the body and its appearance before the judgment seat of Christ. During this interval the soul finds itself being borne along in the grasp of its Guardian Angel. "My work is done, my task is o'er," the Angel sings:

"My Father gave
In charge to me
This child of earth
E'en from his birth.
To serve and save,
Alleluia,
And saved is he.

“This child of clay
To me was given,
To rear and train
By sorrow and pain
In the narrow way,
Alleluia,
From earth to heaven.”

With speed which we cannot measure here the Angel bears the soul to the Judgment Seat of God. It still can hear the voices of its friends reciting with the priest the *Subvenite* around the silent bed of death. But no sooner does it appear in the presence of the Judge than, in the intense energy of love, it darts forward, out of its Angel's hands, straight to the feet of its God. But it is not yet pure enough to enter that effulgence which like a glory “circles round the Crucified.” Passive and still it now lies before the awful Throne, “consumed, yet quickened by the glance of God.”

Its only eagerness is to begin at once its allotted term of suffering and purgation, that cleansed and chastened, it may dwell unceasingly “in the truth of everlasting day.” Of its Angel Guardian it has but one request to make:

“Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the long night-watches keep,
Told out for me.”

So once more its faithful Guardian gently and tenderly takes up that soul, henceforth doubly dear to him, and bears it to those prison gates where the Angels of Purgatory receive his charge. But if he leaves it here, his departure is for a time only. Perchance he may return often to comfort that soul. Doubtless he will know when the hour comes

to reclaim it at last, "from all bond and forfeiture released," with every stain and debt of sin now burned away forever.

At Mary's bidding, the Queen of Angels and of Saints, he will fly with it to the celestial Jerusalem, escorted, as the Church so beautifully sings, by the jubilant company of the martyrs and the Choir of the Angels, all exulting with him, for the crown is won, Alleluia!

The Child Soul and Its Angel Guardian

There is a beautiful poem, "Comforted," by an unfamiliar writer, Emma A. Lente, describing in her exquisite way the experience of a child soul as it is taken up by its Angel Guardian and led, amazed, along the streets of the Heavenly Jerusalem, until it sweetly rests in Mary's arms. Imaginative as the verses are, they are true in the supreme thought which underlies their imagery, the Mother-love of Mary for that pure child soul:

"The angel took the little child,
And bore him past the shining ranks
Of singers and of harpers, past
The golden streets and liliated banks,
Unto a quiet, restful place,
Where Mary sat, with wistful eyes
And tender smile and outstretched hands,
To welcome him to Paradise!

"He was so small and mother-lost.
So dazzled, and so half-afraid,
He could not bear the bliss of heaven,
Or view the hosts in white arrayed,
Until the clasping, loving arms
And gentle voice dispelled his fears,
And dimmed the memory of pain,
And dried the last faint trace of tears.

“He nestled close against the heart,
The mother-heart where Christ once lay,
And felt the blessedness of peace
Balm all his hurts and griefs away;
And Mary sang until he smiled,
And rocked him till, with life elate,
He faced the wonders and the joys
And splendors of his high estate!”

What joy, too, for the Christian mother who has given up her child to God, to know that at Mary's heart it is only waiting to be restored once more to her, in a happiness a million fold more keen than were the sorrows of the parting here below. That, also, is one of the comforting thoughts which the Angel Guardian speaks to the bereaved mother, till, in the light of faith, the rainbow of new hope plays, glorious, through her tears.

Your Guardian Angel

God has assigned to each of us then, a Guardian Angel, a purely spiritual being, of an order higher than our own, commissioned to guide and protect us during the brief course of our pilgrimage on earth, and to bring us safely to our heavenly home.

We do not sensibly perceive him. We hear no whispered warnings in our ear. Our hands cannot touch him nor our eyes look up to him. Yet invisibly he is with us. Silently his influence affects us. From the first moment of life he guarded us and he will not have completed his task until, as we trust, we shall gaze with him in glory on the Vision of our God.

In him we have an unseen friend and benefactor, an intimate and never-failing companion in our journey through life. Our gratitude, no matter how great and unceasing, can

never equal his love and care for us. With Tobias we may well ask: "What can we give him sufficient for these things?"

We know what of old the Angel of God did for Azarias and his companions, when he went down with them into the fiery furnace and drove out the flames, but "made the midst of the furnace like the blowing of a wind bringing dew, and the fire touched them not at all, nor troubled them, nor did them any harm" (Dan. iii, 50). Such signal miracles may not, indeed, have happened to us, but were we only more attentive to our Guardian Angel's watchful care, how often might we not have paused in so many of God's providential dealings with us, and like the great English Cardinal pondered:

"Are these the tracks of some unearthly Friend,
His foot prints, and his vesture-skirts of light?"

How often, perhaps, have we almost felt his presence and his power upbearing and rescuing us from danger.

In the words, therefore, of St. Ambrose: "We should pray to the Angel who is given us as a guardian" (*De Viduis*, IX), and as St. Bernard so justly reminds us in the words already referred to here, we owe to our Guardian Angel: "Reverence for his presence, devotion for his benevolence, confidence for his care" (Serm. 12, on Ps. xc). Above all must we give him our love and obedience.

Newman to His Guardian Angel

With the great Catholic classic author, already so frequently quoted here, let us also address to our own Guardian Angel the words so fondly spoken by him to the Spirit always at his side, for our own is no less close to us.

“My oldest friend, mine from the hour
When first I drew my breath;
My faithful friend, that shall be mine,
Unfailing till my death;

“Thou hast been ever at my side;
My Maker to thy trust
Consign'd my soul, what time He framed
The infant child of dust.

“And thou wilt hang about my bed,
When life is ebbing low;
Of doubt, impatience, and of gloom,
The jealous, sleepless foe.

“Mine, when I stand before the Judge;
And mine, if spared to stay
Within the golden furnace, till
My sin is burn'd away.

“And mine, O Brother of my soul,
When my release shall come;
Thy gentle arms shall lift me then,
Thy wings shall waft me home.”

St. Thérèse to Her Guardian Angel

After the tribute paid by the great Cardinal to his Guardian Angel, which each one has striven to repeat with equal love to his own glorious Protector, I can conclude this little treatise in no better way than by briefly setting down the delightful thoughts of the Little Flower's own poem entitled, "To My Guardian Angel."

Sweetly she begins by recalling to her Guardian Angel how, from the high courts of Heaven, where as a most pure

and holy flame he shines "before the Lord of endless light," he has come down to earth to be her brother, friend and helper from her very birth, always most near to her, by day and night.

"Knowing how weak a child I am," she tells him, "by thy strong hand thou guidest me." The stones in her pathway, the obstacles in her progress, she sees him most carefully removing for her, while his face shines ever more brightly the meeker and the kindlier she herself grows. But her thoughts are not confined to herself alone, she thinks of others too, and so, with that unfailing and considerate love of hers that never allowed her to forget those dear to her, she asks him to go upon her messages to them and gently comfort and console them in her stead.

"O thou who speedest through all space
More swiftly than the lightnings fly!
Go very often, in my place,
To those I love most tenderly.
With thy soft touch, oh! dry their tears;
Tell them the cross is sweet to bear;
Speak my name softly in their ears,
And Jesu's name, supremely fair."

But the great purpose with which her soul burned here below and which she knew would leave her no rest even in Heaven, until the Angel trumpet should be blown and time would be no more, was "to succor souls from sin," to aid in saving them for Christ. To this end, therefore, she begs her Angel Helper to kindle his own burning zeal within her heart. For the rest she knew of nothing that she had to offer God except her holy poverty, together with her daily cross. These she wished him to unite with his own angelic raptures of love and so to present them at the Throne of the Most High.

Yet if her Angel Guardian could forever enjoy the Vision of God, she too might have her Divine Lord with her here below and enclose Him in her very breast. Her Angel, indeed, saw God in Heaven, face to face, but she, in faith, could no less surely kneel within His Presence in the Host, and receive Him in His Eucharistic Gift.

“Thine are heaven’s glory and delight,
The riches of the King of kings;
The Host in our ciboriums bright
Is mine, and all the wealth pain brings.
So with the Cross, and with the Host,
And with thine aid, dear Angel Friend,
I wait in peace, on time’s dark coast,
Heaven’s happiness that knows no end.”

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