



The Angels

Messengers from a loving God



**Mary, Queen
of heaven**

**St Faustina and her
guardian angel**

Sinful Church

**Divine warrior
never fails**

**Blessed are those
who cry**

An angel on a ship

The special object of the angels' care is the human race, which they are appointed to guard.

According to St Ambrose, "Every soul, at the moment it is infused into the body, is entrusted into the keeping of an angel." Every human has a guardian angel appointed to enlighten, protect, defend and guide him during life from the moment of conception. We can call him our invisible body guard or soul guard.

Angels constantly surround the souls of the faithful in their charge with the most tender care and love. They protect our spiritual and our corporal life. They shield us from sudden dangers that threaten our lives or come to the rescue when some harm has befallen us. They help us by keeping the Devil away.

This truth is one of the best supported in scripture and tradition. In the Bible the Lord says, "I will send an angel ahead of you to protect you as you travel and bring you to the place which I have prepared. Pay attention to him and obey him. Do not rebel against him for I have sent him, and he will not pardon such rebellion. But if you do obey him, and do everything I command, I will fight against all your enemies" (Ex. 23: 20-22).

"God will put his angels in charge of you to protect you wherever you



go. They will hold you up with their hands to keep you from hurting your feet on the stones" (Psalm 91:11-12). "His angels guard those who honour the Lord and rescue them from danger" (Psalm 34:7).

Although their principle care is the salvation of souls, they extend their care to other aspects of our lives. They protect us from accidents and deliver us from evil when we have fallen. Scripture says that lest you should hurt yourselves against a stone, the Lord will send his angels round those who fear Him, and he will deliver them from all their tribulations (cf. Psalm 91:11-12).

Thank your angel for watching over you. Make a resolution to be in effective touch with the angels in your daily life.

I assure you of the constant daily prayers of the priests of the Congregation of St Michael the Archangel for all our readers and their families.

God bless you,

Fr **Peter Prusakiewicz** CSMA
www.stmichaelthearchangel.info
www.stmichaelthearchangel.us
[www.michaelites@dol.ca](mailto:michaelites@dol.ca)

The Angels

Messengers from a loving God

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Publisher: The Congregation of Saint Michael the Archangel – Poland

Editor-In-Chief: Father Peter Prusakiewicz (CSMA)

Deputy Editor and Chief Co-ordinator: Noreen Bavister

Editorial Staff: Agata Pawłowska, Karol Wojteczek, Magdalena Świerczewska, Magdalena Szczecina, Karolina Szydłowska, Marta Kobylska, Ewa Rygaliak

English translations: Agata Pawłowska, Joanna Jabłońska

Graphics & Layout: Jacek Kawa

Website: www.stmichaelthearchangel.info

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Editorial Office: The Angels Magazine

ul. Piłsudskiego 248/252, 05-261 Marki. Poland

Email: redakcja.kjb@gmail.com

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Divine Mercy amidst pandemic

The Church grants special indulgence to coronavirus patients and caregivers.

The Apostolic Penitentiary issues a Decree granting special plenary indulgences for those suffering from the coronavirus pandemic, if specific conditions are met.

On 20 March, the Apostolic Penitentiary issued a decree granting plenary indulgences to “the faithful suffering from the Covid-19 virus, commonly known as coronavirus, as well as to healthcare workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them.”

The document comes in response to pastoral, spiritual and sacramental concerns for those affected by the coronavirus pandemic, which has raised “new uncertainties and above all widespread physical and moral suffering”.

The decree is signed by Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, the Major Penitentiary of the Apostolic Penitentiary, and the Regent, Father Krzysztof Nykiel.

Conditions for the plenary indulgence

The Decree grants a plenary indulgence to coronavirus patients quarantined by health authorities in hospitals and in their homes if, “with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite themselves spiritually through the media to



the celebration of the Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion.”

The plenary indulgence can also be obtained by the faithful if they at least “recite the creed, the Lord’s Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father’s intentions), as soon as possible.”

A plenary indulgence is also granted to healthcare workers, family members and all those who,

“exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick” under the same conditions stated above.

Also, the faithful who offer a “visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic adoration, or read the Holy Scriptures for half an hour, or recite the Holy Rosary, or the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or the recitation of the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy” while praying for an end to the pandemic will be granted a plenary indulgence.

A few clarifications

In a note accompanying the Decree, the Apostolic Penitentiary provided

for some eventualities linked with providing the Sacrament of Reconciliation for those affected by the Covid-19 virus.

The note explained that the diocesan bishop has complete discretion over the administration of collective absolution except where there is an “imminent danger of death” or a “grave necessity.” Individual confession remains the ordinary way of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Also, if there is need to impart absolution to several faithful, the priest is obliged to inform the diocesan bishop as soon as possible.

Bishops are also tasked with evaluating the level of the pandemic in their respective jurisdictions to be able to set up prudent protocols for the individual celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation that safeguards the sacramental seal.

The note also encouraged setting up groups of voluntary “extraordinary hospital chaplains” who, obeying health norms and in agreement with health authorities, can provide spiritual assistance to the sick and dying.

Indulgences

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, an indulgence is “a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven.” Indulgences are either partial or plenary depending on if they remove part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin.

Fr **Benedict Mayaki, SJ**
www.vaticannews.va

St Faustina and her guardian angel

From their early childhood Christians pray to their guardian angels to be at their side, to light and guard, to rule and guide them. The prayer indicates a heavenly messenger's tasks towards a man entrusted to him by God. St Sister Faustina, who was in a great friendship with her guardian angel, enriches our knowledge in this matter.

Angels' main mission is to fulfil God's will, which always is good. They see God directly, stay with Him continuously and accomplish His orders. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “With their whole beings the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they ‘always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven’ they are the ‘mighty ones who do His word, hearkening to the voice of His word.’” (Mt 18:10 and Ps 103:20)

No one knows God's will better than angels. No one helps us to fulfil it better than angels. When Jesus became Man, he was similar to us in everything except in sin. He fulfils His Father's will in a perfect way and wishes His disciples do the same. However, we are not able to do it on our own. That is why we have to ask for help every day: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God replies on this request and sends guardian angels to

help us understand what our Father expects from us.

How does it happen? St Thomas Aquinas explains that God alone may affect the will efficaciously but angels may influence the human will by friendly persuasion, by the good apprehended by the intellect or by rousing our passions to prompt us to do good. (S. Th. O. 111, art.2)

St Faustina loved God's will: “Your holy will is the life of my soul.” (Diary 6) Sometimes it was difficult and painful for her but eventually she submitted her will to God's will and chose what He wanted. In this way she converged to her beloved Jesus. In the Diary there is a sentence “From today on, my own will does not exist” crossed off. On the next page there is another sentence “From today on, I do the will of God everywhere, always, and in everything.” (Diary 372)

Her guardian angel helped her in her life. He conveyed the Lord's commands with great delicacy as the most tender mother towards her

child. When one day St Faustina fell on her face weeping and languishing for God, her guardian angel touched her and said: “The Lord orders me to tell you to rise from the ground” (Diary 470).

Apart from telling messages from God, her guardian angel enjoined St Faustina to pray in urgent cases, especially for the dying. One afternoon she came to the garden with her pupils. At one point she heard: “pray for the dying” (Diary 314: 820). She immediately began to say the Rosary encouraging others to pray with her. Next day she was informed that one of the sisters of the congregation died in the moment of her prayer.

Her guardian angel also reassured her in the times of trepidation. Terrified with demons’ hatred towards her, St Faustina asked her guardian angel for help. He at once appeared and said: “Do not fear, spouse of my Lord; without His permission these spirits will do you no harm” (Diary 419).

The angel also taught her by words and signs. Once he took her to purgatory. St Faustina wanted to talk to the souls but her guardian angel beckoned her to leave (Diary 20). Another day she was led by the throne of God where she met lots of saints she knew from pictures. Once again, her guardian angel did not let her talk to them (Diary 683).

St Faustina was strengthened by seeing her guardian angel. When on retreats he assisted her in a visible manner from Vilnius to Warsaw and from Warsaw to Cracow. He disappeared the moment she entered the gate of the order (Diary 490).

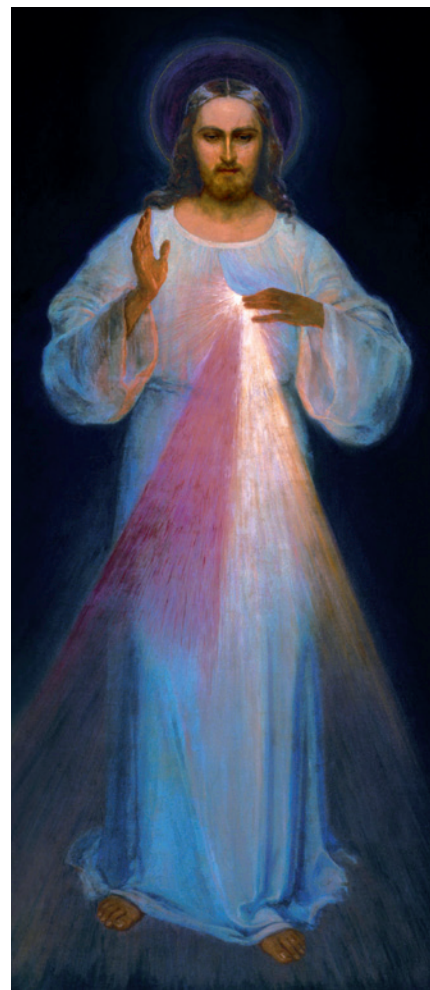
He made her aware of the importance of faithfulness towards God’s

will. When he took her before the throne of God, she saw a great and inaccessible light, and a place destined for her, close to God. Her guardian angel said to her: “Here is your throne, for your faithfulness in fulfilling the will of God” (Diary 683).

Andre Frossard wrote about Pope John Paul II: “The Pope prays like he breathes.” The same may be said about St Faustina. Her everyday ordinary life was filled with a prayer. She mentioned a nine-day novena said in common by the whole community before the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. Apart from that, St Faustina made a personal effort to salute the Virgin Mary a thousand times each day for nine days. She said a thousand “Hail Marys” and never failing in carrying out her duties. It was not an easy task: “I must admit that such a matter requires a good deal of attention and effort” (Diary 1412).

Her guardian angel taught her to be concentrated on God. Once he gave her a lesson of focus of heart and mind: “When we took our seats on the train from Warsaw to Cracow, I once again saw my guardian angel at my side. He was absorbed in prayer and in contemplating God, and I followed him with my thoughts” (Diary 490). St Faustina did not need a chapel to be engrossed in God. She prayed in a train full of travellers. No one disturbed her as her guardian angel was next to her.

Sometimes St Faustina experienced great emotions during prayers. One evening she looked up to the sky and saw the beautiful star-strewn firmament and the moon. An inconceivable fire of love for the Lord welled up within her soul. She glorified Him for all His works and the



■ The Divine Mercy image painted by Eugeniusz Kazimirowski in Vilnius on the direct request of St Faustina, 1934

yearning for God grew even stronger in her (Diary 470).

Our guardian angel assists us like St Faustina’s angel. They inspire us to recognize God’s will, to do what is good, what is perfect in God’s eyes. They rush to our aid so that we could resist the temptations of the Devil. May we model ourselves on the friendship between St Faustina and her guardian angel. He was her best friend, a protector and a sounding board. Perfectly obedient and full of trust towards him, St Faustina asked him for help and intercession.

Fr Karol Dąbrowski CSMA

St Michael and his forgotten grotto



■ Michele Ciatelli, angelic scholar, poet and writer

How did your particular interest in the angels come about? Is it connected with a personal experience of help or intervention in your own life?

My interest in these extraordinary beings created by God must have come about because I am from Olevano sul Tusciano, a town with a great devotion to St Michael the Archangel. Since childhood, I have been fascinated by the traditions and rituals associated with him and with the grotto dedicated to him on nearby Mount Raione. Later, as an adult, I undertook theological studies, thanks to which I could go into the matter on a deeper level. In 2016, I published a book entitled *The secrets of the grotto of St Michael the Archangel in Olevano* (published in Italian and Polish).

Since the 1990s, the shrine on Mount Gargano has enjoyed a new flowering thanks to the titanic work of the Michaelite Fathers. Each year sees the arrival of thousands of pilgrims who entrust their petitions, do penance and thank St Michael the Archangel for favours received. Many of them, however, are unaware that on the opposite side of the Apennine peninsula, lies another shrine dedicated to the Prince of the Heavenly Host. The writer, Michele Ciatelli, tells us about a place which has also seen many miracles.

How did your perception and understanding of the world of the angels change over the years?

I always considered the angels as purely spiritual beings, intermediaries between the human and heavenly spheres, created by God as unsullied spirits, Divine representatives, the messengers and servants of God. We should also add that they have a clearly defined personality and their own names, such as those belonging to the archangels.

What have you found particularly intriguing in your study of the angels?

A text which always awakened my particular interest was Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *De Coelesti Hierarchia*. In this work Pseudo-Dionysius described the angelic hierarchy, consisting of nine choirs, expressing the Divine order. Regarding our guardian angels, on the other hand, I think it is they who communicate Divine guidance.

Another text which has been important to me is the *Homily on the Gospel* by St Gregory the Great. In it we read the following words: "You should be aware that the word 'angel' denotes a function rather than a nature. These holy spirits of heaven have indeed always been spirits. They can only be called angels when they deliver some message. Moreover, those who deliver messages of lesser importance are called angels and those who proclaim messages of supreme importance are called archangels. And so it was that not merely an angel but the Archangel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin Mary. It was only fitting that the highest angel should come to announce the greatest of all messages (...). But personal names are assigned to some, not because they could not be known without them, but rather to denote their ministry when they came among us. Thus, Michael means 'Who is like God'; Gabriel is 'The Strength of God'; and Raphael is 'God's Remedy'.



■ Grotto of St Michael in Olevano, Italy

Whenever some act of wondrous power must be performed, Michael is sent, so that his action and his name may make it clear that no one can do what God does by his superior power.

So too Gabriel, who is called God's strength, was sent to Mary. He came to announce the One who appeared as a humble man to quell the cosmic powers. Thus, God's strength announced the coming of the Lord of the heavenly powers, mighty in battle (Luke 1:11-38).

Raphael means, as I have said, God's remedy, for when he touched Tobit's eyes in order to cure him, he banished the darkness of his blindness (Tobit 11:7-13)."

Your writings include both theological publications and creative writing. What are you trying to convey given that one touches on the intellectual basis of our faith, while the other concentrates more on feelings and emotions. Can we say that one serves to spread devotion to the angels, while the other conveys your personal devotion?

The main aim of my literary activity, both theological and poetic, is to interest the reader in the angels and convey the fruits of my studies. I have a great hope that devotion to the angels will increase as a result of my work. This is why, in 2018, I organised

an international poetry competition, entitled *Quis ut Deus – San Michele Arcangelo*.

In your writing, do you experience an inspiration which could be termed "angelic support"? Would you consider your talent to be God-given?

It would be proud on my part to see my writing as divinely inspired or as part of the Divine plan. My work is for me rather a mission. I feel called to undertake this area of study which enables me to answer my own questions or those which others have asked on the subject of the angels over a number of years.

What do you ask the angels for most often? What requests do you make of them?

I most often turn to the Prince of the Heavenly Host, St Michael the Archangel, whom I always ask for aid to those most in need, for support for the souls of the dying, that he may guide them faithfully before the presence of Almighty God.

You wrote a book about the grotto of St Michael in Olevano. But this place, however, in the consciousness of the faithful, remains in the shadow of that in Gargano. Could you give a short summary of the

history and spiritual significance of the apparitions of St Michael the Archangel in Olevano?

The grotto in Olevano lies at the start of the ancient road which joins Via Popillia with Via Appia, running along the River Tusciano. This road was once an important line of communication, at the end of which lay the grotto on Mt. Gargano.

Both grottoes have been linked with the devotion to St Michael the Archangel since early Christian times, which is why it is inappropriate to attribute greater significance to one or the other. The birth of devotion to St Michael the Archangel is associated with the grotto at Gargano. Over time, a pilgrimage to this shrine became a duty of all Italian pilgrims, whether ordinary penitents, who went there to pray, do penance or ask for intercession or graces, as also of leaders who desired that their undertakings, particularly the conquest of new lands, should take place under the protection of the Holy Warrior.

As far as the story of the cult of St Michael the Archangel in Olevano is concerned, we must return to the year 847, when the Duchy of Salerno, engaged in fierce rivalry with that of Benevento, was established. The Lombard (Longobard) rulers favoured dissemination of devotion to St Michael the Archangel in the shrine on the hill of Mons Aureus near Olevano which rivalled the shrine at Gargano. The desire to expand the shrine had also an economic motive as the presence of pilgrims brought significant gain to the area.

The beginnings of the cult of St Michael the Archangel in Olevano sul Tusciano extends as far back as the 4th century. But one of the most interesting moments of its history is the visit which

was paid to the grotto of St Michael by Brother Bernard between 867 and 870. Returning from Jerusalem, following a difficult sea voyage lasting sixty days, the pilgrims reached shore on the coast at Salerno and reached the grotto at Mons Aureus in Olevano sul Tusciano “where is found a grotto with seven altars surrounded by thick forest. Because of the darkness, no one was able to enter the grotto if he had not first lit a lamp. Here remained Abbot Valentino.” as the monk wrote in *Itinerarium Bernardi Monachi*.

Apart from spiritual experiences, the grotto of St Michael in Olevano offers us extraordinary artistic treasures, thanks to the architecture and historic frescoes. Could you tell us a bit more about this?

Inside the grotto in Olevano were built seven chapels, known as *martyria*. These are laid out along the penitential way, at the start of which is the chapel of St Michael, with the chapel of the Blood of Innocent Martyrs at the end. Pilgrims believed that they would obtain remission of their sins at the end of their penitential road and would enter from darkness into light. Stopping at the last chapel, they would enter into mystical ecstasy, frequently losing all sense of space.

Martyria are Early Christian tombs, in which the faithful venerated relics of holy martyrs. These tombs consist of two sections. In the first of these, known as *triclia*, the funeral banquet would take place; the second, however, known as *cubiculum*, was the actual tomb of the martyr, in which were preserved relics of witnesses to the faith. On the tomb of the saints, known also as *mensa martyrus*, the first Christians celebrated the liturgical agape and ate meals, during which the

mystical participation of the martyrs were marked by the sprinkling of their tombs with oil and wine. This feast was to be a foretaste of the joy which the martyr would enjoy during the eternal agape and at the same time an affirmation of the martyr's triumph.

Almost every author to write on the subject confirms that six of the existing martyria in Olevano were inspired by 4th century pagan tombs, later transformed into Christian chapels.

What is the history of the frescoes?

Apart from the wonderful architecture of the chapels, in the grottoes of Olevano sul Tusciano are preserved some of the most important examples of early medieval art in southern Italy. The frescoes which ornament the walls of the first chapel, known as the Chapel of the Angel originated in the second half of the 10th century. They represent scenes from the life of Jesus from the Gospels.

Their underlying message is the glorification of Almighty God and His Son; they stress the coessential nature of the Incarnate Word with the Father, in opposition to the Arian heresy, particularly in the Gospel scenes from Christ's childhood, baptism and crucifixion as well as by representing Arius in the presence of the Emperor Constantine. Decoration of entire walls is typical of Byzantium, as are other elements of Eastern Christian art, such as the static figures, large eyes and splendid halos.

We also find many representations of the saints in the grottoes: St Peter, St Benedict, St Scholastica, St Placidus, St Maur and St Vitus as well as the representation of Christ *sub specie agni* (in the form of a lamb), which does not belong to the Byzantine tradition. We can admire

the cycle of Christological paintings on both walls of the first chapel.

The paintings in the grotto are termed *Biblia pauperum* – *Bible of the poor*. This term was used in medieval times in relation to a collection of paintings on the walls of a church representing the life of Christ in chronological order. It was thanks to them that everyone, including the poor and illiterate, could get to know the history of salvation.

To what extent is devotion to St Michael the Archangel still alive in Olevano and the surrounding area? Are people aware of his patronage? What is St Michael the Archangel today to local people?

The cult of St Michael the Archangel, patron of Olevano sul Tusciano, remains very much alive and people take an active part in the rituals associated with it. We should stress that Olevano sul Tusciano is a commune which includes Salitto, Ariano and Monticelli – each with own parishes.

In accordance with local tradition, on the 4th Sunday of Lent the parish community of Salitto goes to the grotto for the statue of the Archangel, then carries it in procession to the church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Busolino, where a novena and other prayers are said. On Easter Monday, known in Italy as Pasquetta, the parish community of Ariano collects the statue of St Michael from the parishioners of Salitto and carries it to their own parish church of St Leo the Great. Here a novena and other prayers are again said. The statue remains in Ariano until 25th April, the feast of St Mark the Evangelist. On that day, the parish community from Monticelli carries the figure from Ariano to the church of Santa Maria a Corte and



■ Our Lady with Baby Jesus surrounded by Archangels Michael and Gabriel. The grotto in Olevano, Italy

going through Ariano, reaches Salitto. There, having gone around Valle, Castagneto, Busolino, Porta, Salitto and Capocasale, it stops at the sweeping plateau known as Cannabosto. Here, in accordance with tradition, local people brought large stores of food and organised a feast day meal. Every year a firework display takes place between the hills of Castello di Olevano and Ripa di Pappolondo. The procession then again moves off to accompany the figure of St Michael the Archangel back to the grotto. The entire route is extremely tiring and demands extraordinary effort on the part of those carrying the statue, particularly in the section between Cannabosto and the grotto, where the road winds sharply upwards and is very rocky.

What occurred on the 8th May that people celebrate on that day?

According to popular tradition, which has a confirmation in historical sources, the 8th May commemorates the glory of the victory over the

Saracen pirate gangs which invaded the Mediterranean coast.

Between 845 and 848, Satan, the leader of one such pirate gang, lived in Bari, while Appolofar, another Saracen leader, whose units had conquered the whole of Calabria as far as Salerno, lived in Taranto. Siconolfo, the Duke of Salerno, was unprepared to defend the town and sent messengers to Castrum Olibani with the request for help to hold back the Saracen armies. Castrum Olibani did not have sufficient numbers of soldiers to push back the invaders. Therefore, an attempt was made to defend the town with the help of the people of Olevano.

The inhabitants of Olevano turned to St Michael the Archangel, the protector and defender of these territories, for his intercession and aid, beseeching him: 'Saint Michael the Archangel, come to our aid.' Their pleas and prayers were later comprised in a popular hymn in honour of their Holy Patron. In this way, later generations have been apprised of the story of the miraculous intervention

of St Michael. The hymn in his honour is still sung by the faithful during the procession on his feast.

Returning to the subject of the approaching battle, however, local people, armed with primitive weapons and bearing a standard, summoned by the sound of pipes and drums, resisted the invaders and expelled them from their land. At a certain moment during the battle, the fighters are said to have seen the Archangel Michael, who gave them courage and assured them of their eventual victory. The inhabitants of Olevano displayed outstanding bravery, but, unfortunately, also suffered great losses. The victory affected people greatly and further intensified the cult of their Holy Patron.

In what way could we encourage pilgrims to visit this place?

Well, I think that my book in Italian and Polish opens up new possibilities for my little town. Thanks to it, many Polish people are able to find out about this little-known, but very interesting, place, as much from a historical as well as religious and artistic viewpoint. Disseminating awareness of the grotto of St Michael the Archangel is important for Olevano and my book will allow pilgrims to learn its history. I hope that reading it will encourage them to visit the grotto and initiate the "religious tourism" in Olevano which, for many I have hoped to encourage. I would like to issue a warm invitation to pilgrims to visit this picturesque and extraordinary place dedicated to St Michael. And I hope the book will be translated into English so that English-speaking people can learn more about this place.

Marek Woś was speaking to **Michele Cicatelli**, angelic scholar, poet and writer.

An angel on a ship

In 2005 I worked as a shop assistant on a huge American passenger ship. During a few weeks of a cruise, with beautiful views of the Caribbean and lots of people around me – why did I feel so lonely and hopeless? I did not understand this overwhelming sadness. My relationship with God was virtually dead at that time.



Peter Hansen, www.unsplash.com

One afternoon I was alone in the shop. It seemed strange, for as a rule at least two employees should be present at the store. Anyway, I was arranging ties by a large shop window, and thinking about my loneliness, when I saw a young man. I paid attention to him because his elegant dark suit distinguished him from the various colourful Hawaii shirts other passengers wore.

He entered the shop. Before he opened his mouth I offered him my assistance. He refused politely but then, looking into my eyes, he said, "Remember, you are never alone.

God is with you, your Father who always watches over you."

He began to tell me about the Lord in heaven; his words were like a balm onto my heart. I had an impression that this man could read my soul. It was a truly amazing experience.

Before he left I asked about his name and what he was doing here on the ship as I hadn't seen him before. He replied he was there with his family. His name was Ephraim.

The next day there was an exchange of passengers. I hoped to see Ephraim to say goodbye but, he never appeared again.

I came back home three months later. The first thing I searched on the Internet was the name Ephraim. I found St Ephraim, the Syrian. What was interesting was the fact that the saint died on June 9, 373, while I was born on June 9, 1973.

I believe that good God let me meet my guardian angel face to face. He knew that at that time I was spiritually dead.

I returned to God. Today I know that an encounter with my guardian angel was the beginning of my vivid relationship with God.

Praise the Lord!

Joanna, Poland

Welcome, the great Archangel

Welcome, the great Archangel,
You're the first at the feet of the Lord's throne.
Welcome in the glow of heavenly glory,
Be the light among the earthly darkness.
Ignite our spirits, spark our faith,
To love God and to fight the enemy
– let it be our mutual desire,
Let it be our mutual heartbeat.

O, Holy Archangel, our heavenly protector,
Grant our spirits' resurrection
And release from evil bonds.
Let the flame of love be burned,
to brighten the world with truth and joy,
To give space for God's new order.

Be with us at all times

*Saint Michael, be with us at all times.
Saint Michael, help us in the fight against evil.
Let the cry out of our hearts be heard in one tone:
Who is like God, who is like God, who is like Him.*

Saint Michael, the great prince,
Saint Michael, the conqueror of Satan.
Commander of the heavenly army,
Herald of God's glory, pray for us.

Saint Michael, be with us...

Saint Michael, the joy of angels,
Saint Michael, the honour of heaven.
Our shield in temptations,
Angel of peace, pray for us.

Saint Michael, be with us...

Saint Michael, our salvation's ensign,
Saint Michael, the superior in heaven.
You lead souls to salvation,
Messenger of God, pray for us.

Bowing to your feet

*Bowing to your feet, I want to sing
to you "Who is like God?"*

When I get up in the morning,
I begin to follow my path,
I lift my heart to the Lord,
Please, help my poor soul.

Bowing to your feet...

A guardian angel accompanies me,
I am not afraid of my enemy,
nor noise or silence,
I am with God's messenger.

Bowing to your feet...

When the day is almost over,
Tiredness overwhelms me,
the Lord leans to me in mercy,
I put everything in His hands.

Bowing to your feet...

Lord, at the time of my death,
grant a grace to me – your servant.
Let Saint Michael from your throne
Come for me, oh, come for me.



■ Visitation of the statue of St Michael the Archangel in the Black Madonna Shrine, Jasna Góra, Poland, 2019.

Divine warrior never fails

Michael fights and obtains victory

Given that the attacks of the Evil One, who is very shrewd and intelligent, are relentless, the constant, daily, continuous assistance of St Michael the Archangel is all the more necessary. The Bible, as well as all Christian writers, teach that Satan's activity is various and intelligent, which is why the help which the Archangel brings, must be equally varied and intelligent. John Climacus¹ wrote that the intelligence of the Devil comes from the fact that he is a "many-headed" snake, which is why he attacks us in many ways and why it is hard to fight against him, as the battle is difficult, complex, relentless and demanding. His actions are hidden, which makes overcoming him all the harder. He frequently represents faults as virtues. He is even capable of giving birth to good thoughts, which are in fact demonic and harmful. The action of Satan is based on misleading us, distracting us, shattering, creating illusions, false consolations and all kinds of falsehood. His temptations darken our minds and sow the seed of evil in our hearts. Like pirates, the many heads of the demon constantly attack man, damages and lays waste all the virtue he possesses or to which he aspires.

The demons, however – so the Eastern author writes – are not all-powerful. They are incapable of depriving us of free choice. They are also incapable of predicting the results of our actions, as they do not

know the future. They cannot see into our hearts and learn solely on the basis of observation, by which they look for ways to our hearts. A demon is equally incapable of knowing our thoughts, he has no access to our mind, but is capable of sowing evil thoughts, giving rise to misleading images and awakening our imagination. The demon's action is tailored to the person with whom it battles, which is why it takes a different approach in tempting a religious, for instance, than they would to a person living in the world.

A demon tempts a person during his or her whole life, which is why we need to fight demons always, every day, throughout our lives. Our faith teaches us that we are not alone in this battle. God grants us His grace. He comes to our aid, so that we may want and be capable of putting up intelligent and strong resistance to the Evil One. God supports us in the fight against evil. He wants his servant to oppose the temptations of Satan, repel his attacks, rise up after we fall into sin and live in hope of obtaining final victory.

The grace of God, however, does not act in a vacuum. It is not only a word and a promise, but an actual, God-given reality. God expresses his love (grace) to people in different ways. Without doubt one very particular and extraordinary gift of God is His Son – Jesus Christ. Another gift is Scripture, the codex for living a good life and guarantee of eternal happiness. Another expression of Divine grace are the angels, and

among them, the prince of the heavenly host – St Michael the Archangel. From the beginning – faithful to the teaching of Holy Scripture – the Church has taken him as Her particular patron, intercessor and defender, who continually pleads for help on Her behalf, "Having been nourished with heavenly Bread, we beseech You humbly, O Lord, that drawing from it new strength, under the faithful protection of Your Angels, we may advance boldly along the way of salvation. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."²

The priest recites this prayer on the feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. He thanks God for the strength he draws from the Eucharist and for the assistance of His angels. He is grateful for the progress made on the road to salvation and for the good inspirations which he derives from the angels through Christ Jesus. The Church does not cease to entreat and thank the angels, and in particular, St Michael, for their assistance. It knows that, by the will of the Creator, he is a friend and powerful paraclete.

Thanks to power from heaven, St Michael has accomplished many deeds and brought them to completion. His assistance is effective. Many historical narratives bear witness to them. Dionysius of Fourna (c. 1670-1745) relates around fourteen miracles worked by St Michael the Archangel in his *Hermeneia*.³ He says that among others, Michael showed Hagar water; that Michael prevented Abraham from killing Isaac; Michael forbade the Devil to remove the body of Moses;



■ St Michael vanquishing Satan by Raphael, 1518

that Michael rescued Constantinople from Persian captivity and, together with Gabriel, rescued a child from drowning in the sea.

These are clearly not the only miracles accomplished by the archangel, but they are of great significance and portent. These miracles demonstrate, that – by the will of his Creator – Michael's authority extends over all creatures, both visible and invisible, over people and things. The archangel also stretches his protective cloak over cities and nations. This was what his Lord and Creator, to whom he is obedient in all he does, desires of him.

Divine warrior

I will return for a moment to the subject of Michael – the Divine warrior. It is extremely important with reference to our archangel, as well as

his willing service. He is a warrior, that is, a defender of Divine truth about the world and mankind, of the complete, integral truth, unadulterated, undiluted and undiminished. Michael joins battle, not on his own account, but in the name of God, who is goodness and mercy itself, prince of peace, goodness and justice. He is the warrior of the Divine King, which is why he does not threaten any human being, as he wishes to come to the aid of each person, in order that they might attain eternal happiness.

In terms of iconography, St Michael is represented as a knight in armour, winged, with a sword in his right hand, sometimes holding a lance, a shield with an image or symbol of Christ or a scroll with the text: "I am a warrior of God", "I hold my sword high", "I strike villains with the fear of God" and with a vanquished and chained figure of Satan at his feet. The Archangel Michael is also portrayed on many icons representing his miracles. The best known of these is the Miracle of Chonoe or Colossae in Phrygia, where he saved a church from destruction by pagans who attempted to divert the flow of two rivers and thereby dilute the life-giving spring there. According to tradition, the miracle occurred in Asia Minor, near Hieropolis, where the church in Chonoe was dedicated to the Archangel Michael. The church was looked after by Archippos (an old man with a pointed beard) who asked St Michael for his assistance. St Michael struck a spear into the foundations of the church. With a loud thundering, the earth cleaved into two, and the onrushing waters were funnelled into the great fissure. The icon was popularised after the 13th century and was a popular theme in psalters.⁴

It is he who weighs souls

Angels in apocryphal literature⁵ are tasked with leading souls as they wander from earth towards heaven after death. They are so-called psychopompoi, under the leadership of St Michael. He is also known as the "archangel of the Covenant". The duty of both the angels and St Michael is justified on the basis of the text in Luke's Gospel which says: "the poor man died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's embrace" (Luke 16:22)⁶. This kind of duty of which St Michael takes charge became accepted on the basis of folk beliefs, as testified by hymns to the archangel.

On icons of the Last Judgement, Michael is portrayed in his turn, as weighing souls, almost as an extension of his duty in accompanying souls on the way to heaven. Michael shows himself as the defender of justice and merciful executor of the Divine commands. Not only does he reveal and zealously carry out God's orders, not only is he the guardian of pure truth but he is also the one who opens the door of Divine Mercy for penitents and converts. He is the angel who invites people with great zeal to enter the secret of God's love. It is not without reason that in the eastern Church, the side doors of the iconostasis, known as the deacon's or south doors, and located to the right of the main entrance known as the royal or holy doors, are decorated with the images of the Archangels Gabriel and Michael. The two archangels announce and guard the Divine mysteries, communicate Divine matters to people (announcing to the faithful gathered in church,

the mysteries taking place beyond the Iconostasis), but also communicate to God the concerns of the people, their needs, entreaties, concerns and worries as also their joys, gratitude and joyful experiences.

Devotion to St Michael the Archangel

Devotion to St Michael the Archangel stretches back to the 2nd century AD. Simeon Metaphrastes (also referred to as Symeon the Metaphrast or Symeon the Logothete) writes that, in Phrygia, Asia Minor, St Michael appeared in Cherotopa and left behind a miraculous spring to which hastened multitudes of pilgrims. There was a similar shrine in Chone, a settlement 4 km distant from Colossus, known as 'Michelion'. Devotion to St Michael was so alive in Constantinople, that already in the 6th century, there were as many as ten churches dedicated to him and, in the 9th century there were 15 churches and monasteries with his dedication. Sozomenos and Nikephoros recall a shrine of St Michael by the Bosphorus, founded by the Emperor Constantine in the 4th century. In Constantinople, itself, there was a painting of St Michael, venerated as miraculous, in one of the monasteries which carried his name. Numerous pilgrims took a small amount of olive oil from the lamp which burned before his icon, as it was considered to have healing powers. In Ethiopia, every 12th day of the month was dedicated to St Michael⁷.

In Western Europe the major shrines to St Michael exist to this day: in Italy on the mountain massif of Gargano, Apulia; and, in France on Mont Saint Michel.

Monte Sant'Angelo

In Apulia, Southern Italy, at an altitude of 850 metres above sea level, between San Giovanni Rotondo and Manfredonia, we find the hill of St Michael the Archangel – Monte Sant'Angelo. This shrine is connected to an apparition of St Michael.

It was in the year 490, that a wealthy farmer lost the most attractive bull in his herd. After a long search, his owner discovered the animal kneeling at the summit of the hill at the entrance to a grotto. Wishing to punish him, in his anger, the farmer picked up a bow and shot an arrow. When it neared the animal, this arrow flew back in the opposite direction and injured the archer. Stunned by what happened the farmer went to the local bishop and the latter ordered three days of prayer and penance. On the third day, St Michael the Archangel appeared to the bishop, assuring him that it was a holy place where human sins would be forgiven and prayers sent up to God would be heard. He also advised that the bishop visit the hill and bless the grotto. The latter, however, put off doing this.

Two years later, Flavius Odoacer, leader of the Germanic barbarian tribe (the same who deposed the last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustus), laid siege to Siponto. In the face of unavoidable disaster, St Michael once again appeared to Bishop Lawrence, who, together



with the townspeople, had earlier prayed and fasted for three days. Assuring them of his support, the Archangel ordered them to immediately lead an attack on the besiegers. During a long battle, in which the townspeople defeated the powers of their enemy, there occurred many signs and wonders. In 493, St Lawrence went to the hill, together with the people, in order to thank St Michael for the victory. The bishop sought the advice of the pope and decided to carry out the archangel's advice to bless the grotto. Then St Michael appeared to him again and told him, "Abandon all thought of blessing the grotto. I have chosen it as my dwelling and have already blessed it, together with my angels. You will find signs on the rock as well as my image, an altar, a pallium and cross. You will only enter the grotto and recite the prayers by my side. Tomorrow you will offer the Holy Sacrifice and you will see for yourselves how I myself shall bless this sacred place."

On the following day, the bishop and local inhabitants found a stone altar, covered with a cloth and a cross above it. According to legend, St Michael left a footprint of a child's foot as a sign of his presence. From that time on, the grotto has been

called “the heavenly basilica”, being the only church in the world not consecrated by human hand.

St Michael appeared for the last time in 1656. The plague then ravaged the territories of present-day Italy. Aware of the threat, the local bishop turned to St Michael for his assistance. And so, the sound of an earthquake was to be heard in the bishop’s palace and the archangel appeared in a blinding light and suggested that stones from the grotto with his initials carved in them, should be blessed. Soon after, all in the town and whoever possessed a blessed stone, regained their health and the town was freed from the contagion.

Saints who, over the centuries have visited the grotto as pilgrims, have been aware of the various threats which have their origins in the malicious activities of Satan, as well as of the miraculous intercession of the archangel. Among others, the grotto has been visited in 1216 by St Francis of Assisi, in order to get a plenary indulgence. He did not

feel worthy to enter the grotto itself, however, which was why he kissed the ground on his knees and carved the Tau symbol on a stone. His visit is commemorated by the altar with a copy of this stone. Also St Pio, who lived but 25 km from the holy place, would first ask the faithful who came to him, whether they had visited St Michael, and if they answered in the negative, would send them there first and ask them to return to him once they had done so.

Castel Sant’Angelo

The fortress of the angel is the most characteristic building on the right bank of the Tiber. The building was Hadrian’s mausoleum until 271, when it was incorporated into Rome’s city walls. Theodoric turned it into a prison. In the early 5th century, Honorius rebuilt it as a fortress. When in 537, Rome was besieged by the Goths, the marble carvings decorating the mausoleum were ruined (the defenders used them as missiles against their besieging foes).

Towards the end of the 6th century, Pope Gregory I, known as Pope Gregory the Great, (AD 540-604) transformed the building into the Fortress of the Holy Angel. The castle of the angel is surmounted by a Baroque figure of the Archangel Michael – commander of the Divine armies and executor of Divine judgments – according to the legend of Pope Gregory the Great’s vision. When pestilence laid waste to the city, the pope is said to have seen, during a penitential procession, an image of the Archangel Michael above Hadrian’s Mausoleum, who, as a sign that he had heard their

petitions, and, of the end of God’s anger, placed his sword back in its scabbard. In 608, Pope Boniface IV constructed a chapel to the Holy Angel in Heaven at the top of the building.

Since the 9th century, Castel Sant’Angelo is joined to the Vatican by battlements, intended to protect the basilica and the whole of the Borge Vaticano district. In 1277, a hidden corridor or passetto was constructed, which enabled the popes to escape into the fortress. Pope Clement VII made use of it during the famous ‘Sack of Rome’ in 1527, when Lutheran military units of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V conquered Rome.

Mont Saint Michael

The most celebrated shrine in France is to be found on a small rocky island, rising out of the sea. On it is a Benedictine monastery. The old name of the island of Mercury was changed to that of St Michel. The story has it that in 708 St Michael appeared to St Aubert, Bishop of Avranches, asking him to build a church on the rock. The bishop twice ignored the plea, up until the moment that St Michael, touching the bishop’s head with his finger, burnt a hole in it, but left the unfortunate bishop alive. The bishop’s skull with this very hole remains to this day in the cathedral in Avranches. Soon afterwards, the first chapel was built in the grotto and the earlier name of Mont Tombe was altered to that of Mont Saint-Michel-au-péril-de-la-Mer. According to legend, alleged miracles took place during the building



work -the morning dew marked out the foundations, a stolen cow suddenly appeared where the first piece of granite was to be laid, a babe in arms shifted a rock, which blocked the road, with his feet and St Michael also appeared, indicating the spot where there was a source of fresh water. St Louis IX made pilgrimages to the monastery in 1256 and 1264.

The vision of Pope Leo XIII

On the 13th October 1884, Pope Leo XIII experienced an extraordinary mystical experience. During the time of thanksgiving after Holy Mass he went into a short ecstasy during which he heard, close to the tabernacle, the following dialogue of Satan with Christ. In a harsh, hoarse voice, filled with rage, Satan shouted: I can devastate Your Church! In a calm voice, Christ replied: Can you? So, try. Satan: But I need more time and power! Jesus: How much time and power do you need? Satan: From 75 to 100 years and greater power over those who serve me. Jesus:

You will have this time and power. Which century will you chose?

Satan: The one which is coming (the 20th century). Jesus: So, try, if you can. After this experience, Leo XIII went hurriedly to his office, which he left thirty minutes later, having written this prayer to St Michael the Archangel: Sancte Michael Archangele, defende nos in proelio; contra nequitiam et insidias diaboli esto praesidium. Imperat illi Deus; supplices deprecamur: tuque, Princeps militiae coelestis, Satanam aliosque spiritus malignos, Qui ad perditionem animarum pervagantur in mundo, Divina virtute in infernum detrude. Amen. (St Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle...)

In 1886, Pope Leo XIII recommended that this prayer be said after Low Masses due to the threat to the Church (from the Kulturkampf and freemasonry). This prayer was abolished in 1967 and re-instated at the end of the 20th century.

Fr **Zdzisław Józef Kijas** OFMConv

Part of the book
*Under the protection
of St Michael the Archangel.*

To order go to page 31 of this magazine.



■ Blessed Fr Bronisław Markiewicz, founder of the Congregation of St Michael the Archangel

PRAYERS

Novena prayer for healing

Lord Jesus Christ, while on earth you bent down to every human suffering. We implore you through the intercession of Blessed Bronisław Markiewicz for a miracle of healing for N.....

If it is your Will, O God, let him/her return to good health and praise you joyfully for the grace received through the intercession of your servant Blessed Bronisław Markiewicz. We make this prayer through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Blessed Bronisław Markiewicz

Lord Jesus Christ, concealed in the Most Blessed Sacrament, I beg you through the love which you have for your Most Holy Mother, to magnify my faith, hope and love.

Give me the spirit of true repentance. Grant me everything for which the Most Holy Virgin asks for me, who live and reign with God the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

- 1 Saint John Climacus, also known as John of the Ladder, John Scholasticus and John Sinaites is one of the most popular Eastern ascetic authors. He lived in a monastery on Mount Sinai in the 7th century. His famous work is *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* or *Ladder of Paradise*
- 2 Roman Missal, prayer after Communion for the Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael and also for the Mass of The Holy Angels.
- 3 Dionysius of Fourn, *Hermeneia*
- 4 www.drogaikony.org.pl/2013/09/ikony-swietych-archanioow-michaa.html, text: Jolanta Wroczyńska
- 5 This is the term used for biblical literature, considered not to be divinely inspired and therefore not included in the canon of the books of the Bible
- 6 Mieczysław C. Paczkowski, One of the seven – *angels on the background of Judaic diaspora and Judeo-Christianity*, [in] *St Michael the Archangel*, p.85
- 7 See Bożena Modzelewska, Marzenna Straszewicz, *St Michael the Archangel, Devotion*, "Catholic Encyclopedia", vol. 12, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 2008

How the founder became blessed

Father Bronisław Markiewicz died on 29th January 1912. He was considered a saint even before death. People came from far places to ask him for a prayer. Fr Michułka, his co-worker said: "In Fr Markiewicz I saw a new kind of saint. His bright smiling face, loving words towards everybody, even a small child, convinced me that saints are people who, like Jesus Christ, embrace everyone with their hearts and do good to everyone."

Congregations of St Michael the Archangel, founded by Fr Bronisław Markiewicz, made great efforts to proclaim him blessed first, and later – a saint. In addition to legal actions, in Miejsce Piastowe and everywhere in the world where the Michaelite fathers and sisters work, there was a fervent and persistent prayer for his beatification. Pilgrimages, vigils, novenas were organized as well as fasts and other spiritual sacrifices. A large group of lay people such as the Knights of St Michael, pupils and the youth of oratories and orphanages run by the Michaelite Fathers, parishoners and others, contributed to this prayer.

The information process began in Przemyśl on 8th December 1958. On the 2nd July 1994, Pope John Paul II promulgated a decree on the heroic virtues of Father Markiewicz.

The last step to beatification was a miracle worked by God through the intercession of the would-be blessed, treated as a sign from heaven. For many years the faithful received many graces and spiritual and physical healings from Fr Markiewicz.

On the 31st August 1994, as usual Fr Roman Włodarczyk CSMA celebrated a Holy Mass in the parish of St Michael the Archangel in Toruń, Poland, when he suddenly lost his speech. The next day he suffered from paralysis of his right arm and loss of power in his legs. The sick priest was taken to the hospital. Further examinations proved that he had had a stroke. The diagnosis was: "right-sided, half-stroke paralysis with aphasia due to cerebral thrombosis." The patient's severe condition lasted for nearly 6 weeks. At that time, according to witnesses, Fr Włodarczyk was in a state of agony. Doctors prepared his friars for his death. They said that even if he survived he would face permanent disability.

News about Fr Włodarczyk spread quickly around the Toruń parishes and the Michaelite brothers and sisters. Fr Kazimierz Tomaszewski, the Superior General of the Congregation of St Michael the Archangel, called everybody to pray for the healing miracle of a sick priest by the intercession of their founder, Fr Bronisław

Markiewicz. How couldn't he intercede for his spiritual son? His prayer was so effective when he was on this earth; why wouldn't it be in heaven?

"Everyone who asks receives" (Matthew 7:8). Persistent continuous prayer pierced the sky. In mid-September the condition of Fr Włodarczyk suddenly improved.

One of the doctors said, "I considered his state as severe, without any chances to improve. In my 18-year medical practice I have never seen such a case. The recovery was surprisingly quick and permanent. It just does not happen with patients with partial paralysis. It cannot be explained from a medical point of view."

Fr Roman Włodarczyk came back home on the 21st October 1994, perfectly healthy and without any signs of a serious illness. Subsequent tests in 1996, 2003 and 2004 confirmed his healing as complete, permanent and with no evidence of neurological damage.

The Congregation of St Michael the Archangel asked the Diocesan Curia in Toruń to initiate a beatification process. The case was referred to the Holy See. On the 22nd April 2004, the Vatican Medical Committee proved that Fr Włodarczyk's healing was inexplicable from the medical point of view. Two months later the Vatican Theological Committee confirmed that the miraculous healing was closely related to prayers by the intercession of Fr Markiewicz.

On the 20th December 2004, Pope John Paul II promulgated the miracle decree. The Beatification Mass took place on the 19th June 2005, in Warsaw. The Michaelite family gained a great intercessor in heaven.

Fr Peter Prusakiewicz CSMA

The Hail Mary (Part 1)

A Christ-centred prayer that gives Jesus great praise and helps us reflect deeply on our faith. The connecting thread throughout the prayer is the one at the centre of our faith: Jesus.

Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of death. Amen.

The Hail Mary prayer is separated into two main parts:

a) Recognising Mary as the sinless mother of Jesus, the one who gave birth to our Saviour, and played a role in our salvation.

b) Asking Blessed Mary to pray for us “now and at the hour of our death,” and to be our intercessor before her son.

St Pope John Paul II, who was devoted to Our Blessed Mother Mary, said the Rosary was his favourite prayer. He wrote of the importance and meaning of this prayer in his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, issued on October 16th, 2002, the “Year of the Rosary” and at the beginning of the twenty-fifth year of his pontificate.



■ St Pope John Paul II

APOSTOLIC LETTER ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS, CLERGY AND FAITHFUL ON THE MOST HOLY ROSARY

Introduction

1. The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, which gradually took form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God, is a prayer loved by countless saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness. It blends easily into the spiritual journey of the Christian life, which, after two

thousand years, has lost none of the freshness of its beginnings and feels drawn by the Spirit of God to “set out into the deep” (*duc in altum!*) in order once more to proclaim, and even cry out, before the world that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour, “the way, and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6), “the goal of human history and the point on which the desires of history and civilization turn” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 45).

The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a

Christocentric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium. It is an echo of the prayer of Mary, her perennial *Magnificat* for the work of the redemptive Incarnation which began in her virginal womb. With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though

from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.

The Popes and the Rosary

2. Numerous predecessors of mine attributed great importance to this prayer. Worthy of special note in this regard is Pope Leo XIII who on 1st September 1883 promulgated the Encyclical *Supremi Apostolatus Officio*, a document of great worth, the first of his many statements about this prayer, in which he proposed the Rosary as an effective spiritual weapon against the evils afflicting society. Among the more recent popes who, from the time of the Second Vatican Council, have distinguished themselves in promoting the Rosary I would mention Blessed John XXIII and above all Pope Paul VI, who in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* emphasized, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, the Rosary's evangelical character and its Christocentric inspiration. I myself have often encouraged the frequent recitation of the Rosary. From my youthful years this prayer has held an important place in my spiritual life. I was powerfully reminded of this during my recent visit to Poland, and in particular at the Shrine of Kalwaria. The Rosary has accompanied me in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty. To it I have entrusted any number of concerns; in it I have always found comfort. Twenty-four years ago, on 29th October 1978, scarcely two weeks after my election to the See of Peter, I frankly admitted: "The Rosary is my favourite prayer. A marvellous prayer! Marvellous in its simplicity and its depth. [...]. It can be said that the Rosary is, in some sense, a prayer-commentary on the final

chapter of the Vatican II Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, a chapter which discusses the wondrous presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and the Church.

Against the background of the words *Ave Maria* the principal events of the life of Jesus Christ pass before the eyes of the soul. They take shape in the complete series of the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries, and they put us in living communion with Jesus through – we might say – the heart of his Mother. At the same time our heart can embrace in the decades of the Rosary all the events that make up the lives of individuals, families, nations, the Church, and all mankind. Our personal concerns and those of our neighbour, especially those who are closest to us, who are dearest to us. Thus the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life".

With these words, dear brothers and sisters, I set the first year of my Pontificate within the daily rhythm of the Rosary. Today, as I begin the twenty-fifth year of my service as the Successor of Peter, I wish to do the same. How many graces have I received in these years from the Blessed Virgin through the Rosary: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*! I wish to lift up my thanks to the Lord in the words of his Most Holy Mother, under whose protection I have placed my Petrine ministry: *Totus Tuus*!

October 2002 – October 2003: The Year of the Rosary

3. Therefore, in continuity with my reflection in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in which, after the experience of the Jubilee, I invited the people of God to start afresh from Christ, I have felt drawn to offer

a reflection on the Rosary, as a kind of Marian complement to that Letter and an exhortation to contemplate the face of Christ in union with, and at the school of, his Most Holy Mother. To recite the Rosary is nothing other than to contemplate with Mary the face of Christ. As a way of highlighting this invitation, prompted by the forthcoming 120th anniversary of the aforementioned Encyclical of Leo XIII, I desire that during the course of this year the Rosary should be especially emphasized and promoted in the various Christian communities. I therefore proclaim the year from October 2002 to October 2003, the Year of the Rosary.

I leave this pastoral proposal to the initiative of each ecclesial community. It is not my intention to encumber but rather to complete and consolidate pastoral programmes of the Particular Churches. I am confident that the proposal will find a ready and generous reception. The Rosary, reclaimed in its full meaning, goes to the very heart of Christian life; it offers a familiar yet fruitful spiritual and educational opportunity for personal contemplation, the formation of the People of God, and the new evangelization. I am pleased to reaffirm this also in the joyful remembrance of another anniversary: the fortieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on October 11th, 1962, the "great grace" disposed by the Spirit of God for the Church in our time.

Objections to the Rosary

4. The timeliness of this proposal is evident from a number of considerations. First, the urgent need to

counter a certain crisis of the Rosary, which in the present historical and theological context can risk being wrongly devalued, and therefore no longer taught to the younger generation. There are some who think that the centrality of the Liturgy, rightly stressed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, necessarily entails giving lesser importance to the Rosary. Yet, as Pope Paul VI made clear, not only does this prayer not conflict with the Liturgy, it sustains it, since it serves as an excellent introduction and a faithful echo of the Liturgy, enabling people to participate fully and interiorly in it and to reap its fruits in their daily lives.

Perhaps too, there are some who fear that the Rosary is somehow un-ecumenical because of its distinctly Marian character. Yet the Rosary clearly belongs to the kind of veneration of the Mother of God described by the Council: a devotion directed to the Christological centre of the Christian faith, in such a way that when the Mother is honoured, the Son ... is duly known, loved and glorified. If properly revitalized, the Rosary is an aid and certainly not a hindrance to ecumenism!

A path of contemplation

5. But the most important reason for strongly encouraging the practice of the Rosary is that it represents a most effective means of fostering among the faithful that commitment to the contemplation of the Christian mystery which I have proposed in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* as a genuine “training in holiness”: “What is needed is a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer”. Inasmuch

as contemporary culture, even amid so many indications to the contrary, has witnessed the flowering of a new call for spirituality, due also to the influence of other religions, it is more urgent than ever that our Christian communities should become “genuine schools of prayer”.

The Rosary belongs among the finest and most praiseworthy traditions of Christian contemplation. Developed in the West, it is a typically meditative prayer, corresponding in some way to the “prayer of the heart” or “Jesus prayer” which took root in the soil of the Christian East.

Prayer for peace and for the family

6. A number of historical circumstances also make a revival of the Rosary quite timely. First of all, the need to implore from God the gift of peace. The Rosary has many times been proposed by my predecessors and myself as a prayer for peace. At the start of a millennium which began with the terrifying attacks of 11th September 2001, a millennium which witnesses every day in numerous parts of the world fresh scenes of bloodshed and violence, to rediscover the Rosary means to immerse oneself in contemplation of the mystery of Christ who “is our peace”, since he made “the two of us one, and broke down the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14). Consequently, one cannot recite the Rosary without feeling caught up in a clear commitment to advancing peace, especially in the land of Jesus, still so sorely afflicted and so close to the heart of every Christian.

A similar need for commitment and prayer arises in relation to another critical contemporary issue:

the family, the primary cell of society, increasingly menaced by forces of disintegration on both the ideological and practical planes, so as to make us fear for the future of this fundamental and indispensable institution and, with it, for the future of society as a whole. The revival of the Rosary in Christian families, within the context of a broader pastoral ministry to the family, will be an effective aid to countering the devastating effects of this crisis typical of our age.

“Behold, your Mother!” (Jn 19:27)

7. Many signs indicate that still today the Blessed Virgin desires to exercise through this same prayer that maternal concern to which the dying Redeemer entrusted, in the person of the beloved disciple, all the sons and daughters of the Church: “Woman, behold your son!” (Jn 19:26). Well-known are the occasions in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries on which the Mother of Christ made her presence felt and her voice heard, in order to exhort the People of God to this form of contemplative prayer. I would mention in particular, on account of their great influence on the lives of Christians and the authoritative recognition they have received from the Church, the apparitions of Lourdes and of Fatima; these shrines continue to be visited by great numbers of pilgrims seeking comfort and hope.

Following the witnesses

8. It would be impossible to name all the many saints who discovered in the Rosary a genuine path to growth in holiness. We need but mention Saint Louis Marie Grignon de

CHAPTER I

CONTEMPLATING CHRIST WITH MARY

A face radiant as the sun

9. “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun” (Mt 17:2). The Gospel scene of Christ’s transfiguration, in which the three Apostles Peter, James and John appear entranced by the beauty of the Redeemer, can be seen as an icon of Christian contemplation. To look upon the face of Christ, to recognize its mystery amid the daily events and the sufferings of his human life, and then to grasp the divine splendour definitively revealed in the Risen Lord, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father: this is the task of every follower of Christ and therefore the task of each one of us. In contemplating Christ’s face, we become open to receiving the mystery of Trinitarian life, experiencing ever anew the love of the Father and delighting in the joy of the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul’s words can then be applied to us: “Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

Mary, model of contemplation

10. The contemplation of Christ has an *incomparable model* in Mary. In a unique way the face of the Son belongs to Mary. It was in her womb that Christ was formed, receiving from her a human resemblance which points to an even greater spiritual closeness.

No one has ever devoted themselves to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary. The eyes of her heart already turned to him at the Annunciation, when she conceived him by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the months that followed she began to sense his presence and to picture his features. When at last she gave birth to him in Bethlehem, her eyes were able to gaze tenderly on the face of her Son, as she “wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger” (Lk 2:7).

Thereafter Mary’s gaze, ever filled with adoration and wonder, would never leave him. At times it would be a questioning look, as in the episode of the finding in the Temple: “Son, why have you treated us so?” (Lk 2:48); it would always be a penetrating gaze, one capable of deeply understanding Jesus, even to the point of perceiving his hidden feelings and anticipating his decisions, as at Cana (cf. Jn 2:5). At other times it would be a look of sorrow, especially beneath the Cross, where her vision would still be that of a mother giving birth, for Mary not only shared the passion and death of her Son, she also received the new son given to her in the beloved disciple (cf. Jn 19:26-27). On the morning of Easter, hers would be a gaze radiant with the joy of the Resurrection, and finally, on the day of Pentecost, a gaze afire with the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14).

Mary’s memories

11. Mary lived with her eyes fixed on Christ, treasuring his every word: “She kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51). The memories of Jesus, impressed upon her heart, were always



■ Bl Bartolo Longo, the Apostle of the Rosary

Montfort, the author of an excellent work on the Rosary, and, closer to ourselves, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, whom I recently had the joy of canonizing. As a true apostle of the Rosary, Blessed Bartolo Longo had a special charism. His path to holiness rested on an inspiration heard in the depths of his heart: “Whoever spreads the Rosary is saved!” (Blessed Bartolo Longo, *Storia del Santuario di Pompei*, Pompei, 1990, 59). As a result, he felt called to build a Church dedicated to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Pompei, against the background of the ruins of the ancient city, which scarcely heard the proclamation of Christ before being buried in AD 79 during an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, only to emerge centuries later from its ashes as a witness to the lights and shadows of classical civilization. By his whole life’s work and especially by the practice of the “Fifteen Saturdays”, Bartolo Longo promoted the Christocentric and contemplative heart of the Rosary, and received great encouragement and support from Leo XIII, the “Pope of the Rosary”.

with her, leading her to reflect on the various moments of her life at her Son's side. In a way those memories were to be the "rosary" which she recited uninterruptedly throughout her earthly life.

Even now, amid the joyful songs of the heavenly Jerusalem, the reasons for her thanksgiving and praise remain unchanged. They inspire her maternal concern for the pilgrim Church, in which she continues to relate her personal account of the Gospel. Mary constantly sets before the faithful the "mysteries" of her Son, with the desire that the contemplation of those mysteries will release all their saving power. In the recitation of the Rosary, the Christian community enters into contact with the memories and the contemplative gaze of Mary.

The Rosary, a contemplative prayer

12. The Rosary, precisely because it starts with Mary's own experience, is an exquisitely contemplative prayer. Without this contemplative dimension, it would lose its meaning, as Pope Paul VI clearly pointed out: "Without contemplation, the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation runs the risk of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas, in violation of the admonition of Christ: 'In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words' (Mt 6:7). By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries

are disclosed" (Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, 2 February 1974).

It is worth pausing to consider this profound insight of Paul VI, in order to bring out certain aspects of the Rosary which show that it is really a form of Christocentric contemplation.

Remembering Christ with Mary

13. Mary's contemplation is above all a remembering. We need to understand this word in the biblical sense of remembrance (*zakar*) as a making present of the works brought about by God in the history of salvation. The Bible is an account of saving events culminating in Christ himself. These events not only belong to "yesterday"; they are also part of the "today" of salvation. This making present comes about above all in the Liturgy: what God accomplished centuries ago did not only affect the direct witnesses of those events; it continues to affect people in every age with its gift of grace. To some extent this is also true of every other devout approach to those events: to "remember" them in a spirit of faith and love is to be open to the grace which Christ won for us by the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection.

Consequently, while it must be reaffirmed with the Second Vatican Council that the Liturgy, as the exercise of the priestly office of Christ and an act of public worship, is "the summit to which the activity of the Church is directed and the font from which all its power flows" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10) it is also necessary to recall that the spiritual life "is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. Christians, while they are

called to prayer in common, must also go to their own rooms to pray to their Father in secret (cf. Mt 6:6); indeed, according to the teaching of the Apostle, they must pray without ceasing (cf. 1 Thes 5:17)". The Rosary, in its own particular way, is part of this varied panorama of "ceaseless" prayer. If the Liturgy, as the activity of Christ and the Church, is a saving action par excellence, the Rosary too, as a "meditation" with Mary on Christ, is a salutary contemplation. By immersing us in the mysteries of the Redeemer's life, it ensures that what he has done and what the liturgy makes present is profoundly assimilated and shapes our existence.

Learning Christ from Mary

14. Christ is the supreme Teacher, the revealer and the one revealed. It is not just a question of learning what he taught but of "learning him". In this regard could we have any better teacher than Mary? From the divine standpoint, the Spirit is the interior teacher who leads us to the full truth of Christ (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). But among creatures no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother.

The first of the "signs" worked by Jesus – the changing of water into wine at the marriage in Cana – clearly presents Mary in the guise of a teacher, as she urges the servants to do what Jesus commands (cf. Jn 2:5). We can imagine that she would have done likewise for the disciples after Jesus' Ascension, when she joined them in awaiting the Holy Spirit and supported them in their first mission. Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a



■ Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompeii

means of learning from her to “read” Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message.

This school of Mary is all the more effective if we consider that she teaches by obtaining for us in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as she offers us the incomparable example of her own “pilgrimage of faith” (*Lumen Gentium*, 58).

As we contemplate each mystery of her Son’s life, she invites us to do as she did at the Annunciation: to ask humbly the questions which open us to the light, in order to end with the obedience of faith: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Being conformed to Christ with Mary

15. Christian spirituality is distinguished by the disciple’s commitment to become conformed ever more fully to his Master (cf. Rom 8:29; Phil 3:10,12). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism grafts the believer like a branch onto the vine which is Christ (cf. Jn 15:5) and makes him a member of Christ’s mystical Body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12; Rom 12:5). This initial unity, however, calls for a growing assimilation which will increasingly shape the conduct of the disciple in accordance with the “mind” of Christ: “Have this mind

among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). In the words of the Apostle, we are called “to put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27).

In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation – in Mary’s company – of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship. We are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ’s life and as it were to share his deepest feelings. In this regard Blessed Bartolo Longo has written: “Just as two friends, frequently in each other’s company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection” (*I Quindici Sabati del Santissimo Rosario*, 27th ed., Pompei, 1916, 27).

In this process of being conformed to Christ in the Rosary, we entrust ourselves in a special way to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin. She who is both the Mother of Christ and a member of the Church, indeed her “pre-eminent and altogether singular member”, is at the same time the “Mother of the Church”. As such, she continually brings to birth children for the mystical Body of her Son. She does so through her intercession, imploring upon them the inexhaustible outpouring of the Spirit. Mary is the perfect icon of the motherhood of the Church.

The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary's side as she is busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth. This enables her to train us and to mould us with the same care, until Christ is "fully formed" in us (cf. Gal 4:19). This role of Mary, totally grounded in that of Christ and radically subordinated to it, "in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power". This is the luminous principle expressed by the Second Vatican Council which I have so powerfully experienced in my own life and have made the basis of my episcopal motto: *Totus Tuus*. The motto is of course inspired by the teaching of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, who explained in the following words Mary's role in the process of our configuration to Christ: "Our entire perfection consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ. Hence the most perfect of all devotions is undoubtedly that which conforms, unites and consecrates us most perfectly to Jesus Christ. Now, since Mary is of all creatures the one most conformed to Jesus Christ, it follows that among all devotions that which most consecrates and conforms a soul to our Lord is devotion to Mary, his Holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to her the more will it be consecrated to Jesus Christ" (Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary). Never as in the Rosary do the life of Jesus and that of Mary appear so deeply joined. Mary lives only in Christ and for Christ!

Praying to Christ with Mary

16. Jesus invited us to turn to God with insistence and the confidence

that we will be heard: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Mt 7:7). The basis for this power of prayer is the goodness of the Father, but also the mediation of Christ himself (cf. 1Jn 2:1) and the working of the Holy Spirit who "intercedes for us" according to the will of God (cf. Rom 8:26-27). For "we do not know how to pray as we ought" (Rom 8:26), and at times we are not heard "because we ask wrongly" (cf. Jas 4:2-3).

In support of the prayer which Christ and the Spirit cause to rise in our hearts, Mary intervenes with her maternal intercession. "The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2679).

If Jesus, the one Mediator, is the Way of our prayer, then Mary, his purest and most transparent reflection, shows us the Way. "Beginning with Mary's unique cooperation with the working of the Holy Spirit, the Churches developed their prayer to the Holy Mother of God, centering it on the person of Christ manifested in his mysteries" (24 Ibid., 2675).

At the wedding of Cana the Gospel clearly shows the power of Mary's intercession as she makes known to Jesus the needs of others: "They have no wine" (Jn 2:3).

The Rosary is both meditation and supplication. Insistent prayer to the Mother of God is based on confidence that her maternal intercession can obtain all things from the heart of her Son. She is "all-powerful by grace", to use the bold expression, which needs to be properly understood, of Blessed Bartolo Longo in his Supplication to Our Lady. This is a conviction which, beginning with the Gospel, has grown ever more firm

in the experience of the Christian people. The supreme poet Dante expresses it marvellously in the lines sung by Saint Bernard: "Lady, thou art so great and so powerful, that whoever desires grace yet does not turn to thee, would have his desire fly without wings" (Divina Commedia, Paradiso XXXIII, 13-15.) When in the Rosary we plead with Mary, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35), she intercedes for us before the Father who filled her with grace and before the Son born of her womb, praying with us and for us.

Proclaiming Christ with Mary

17. The Rosary is also a path of proclamation and increasing knowledge, in which the mystery of Christ is presented again and again at different levels of the Christian experience. Its form is that of a prayerful and contemplative presentation, capable of forming Christians according to the heart of Christ. When the recitation of the Rosary combines all the elements needed for an effective meditation, especially in its communal celebration in parishes and shrines, it can present a significant catechetical opportunity which pastors should use to advantage. In this way too Our Lady of the Rosary continues her work of proclaiming Christ. The history of the Rosary shows how this prayer was used in particular by the Dominicans at a difficult time for the Church due to the spread of heresy. Today we are facing new challenges. Why should we not once more have recourse to the Rosary, with the same faith as those who have gone before us? The Rosary retains all its power and continues to be a valuable pastoral resource for every good evangelizer.

Litany of Mary, Queen of heaven

For private recital only.

Lord have mercy on us.
 Christ have mercy on us.
 Lord have mercy on us.
 Christ, hear us.
 Christ, graciously hear us.

God, the Father of heaven, have mercy on us.
 God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.
 God the Holy Ghost, have mercy on us.
 Holy Trinity, One God, have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, pray for us.
 Holy Mother of God, pray for us.
 Most honoured of Virgins, pray for us.
 Chosen daughter of the Father, pray for us.
 Mother of Christ the King, pray for us.
 Glory of the Holy Spirit, pray for us.
 Virgin daughter of Zion, pray for us.
 Virgin poor and humble, pray for us.
 Virgin gentle and obedient, pray for us.
 Handmaid of the Lord, pray for us.
 Mother of the Lord, pray for us.
 Helper of the Redeemer, pray for us.
 Full of grace, pray for us.
 Fountain of beauty, pray for us.
 Model of virtue, pray for us.
 First fruit of the Redemption, pray for us.
 Perfect disciple of Christ, pray for us.
 Untarnished image of the Church, pray for us.
 Woman transformed, pray for us.
 Woman clothed with the sun, pray for us.
 Woman crowned with stars, pray for us.
 Gentle Lady, pray for us.
 Gracious Lady, pray for us.
 Our Lady, pray for us.
 Joy of Israel, pray for us.
 Splendour of the Church, pray for us.
 Pride of the human race, pray for us.
 Advocate of grace, pray for us.
 Minister of holiness, pray for us.
 Champion of God's people, pray for us.
 Queen of love, pray for us.



■ *The Coronation of the Virgin with Six Saints* by Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, 1504

Queen of mercy, pray for us.
 Queen of peace, pray for us.
 Queen of Angels, pray for us.
 Queen of Patriarchs and Prophets, pray for us.
 Queen of Apostles and Martyrs, pray for us.
 Queen of Confessors and Virgins, pray for us.
 Queen of all Saints, pray for us.
 Queen conceived without Original Sin, pray for us.
 Queen assumed into heaven, pray for us.
 Queen of all the earth, pray for us.
 Queen of heaven, pray for us.
 Queen of the universe, pray for us.

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
 spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
 graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
 have mercy on us.

Let us pray.

Father, Thou hast given us the Mother of Thy Son
 to be our Queen and Mother. With the support
 of her prayers may we come to share the glory
 of Thy children in the kingdom of heaven.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.
 Amen.

A sinful Church

As a child, it seemed to me that a priest was like a bomb disposal expert – one mistake and they were finished. I was convinced that they could only remain as priests for as long as they did not commit grave sins.

I have grown out of this kind of thinking. However, I retain the impression that many other people continue to approach the priesthood and the sins of other people in this way, seeing it as its complete and irreversible negation. Each time I meet with a certain friend, he repeats the same story of the priest from his days at primary school who had an affair with the R.E. teacher. He uses this example as the cause, or one of the causes of his “lack of faith in the Church”. While such behaviour is obviously regrettable and should make us sad, can something like this really separate a person with genuine faith in God from the Church?

The splinter as against the plank

We sometimes come across those who use the sins of Christians as an argument against the Church. Which of us has not met with a person who claims not to go to church, because, so they say, it is full of sinners and hypocrites, or who “does not believe in the Church” because of the sins of other Christians (whether popes, clergy or ordinary believers)? By this, I obviously do not mean those extreme cases where a person has been genuinely harmed

by those claiming to be Christians, when such harm could have a major impact on their spiritual life.

The difficulty with such an attitude to the problem is that the majority of sins which we deplore in others are frequently those that we commit ourselves and even fail to notice. It is always easier to see the splinter in another’s eyes and not the plank in one’s own. We inevitably find a million excuses and can plead many mitigating circumstances for our own behaviour. We do, however, find it much more difficult to excuse the behaviour of others. This is what gives some people the impression that the Church is made up of hypocrites, among whom there is always to be found one righteous person – his or her own self. The situation demands that we take a step back, in order not to sink into hypocrisy and stain our own honour.

Let us approach the problem differently. If the sin of my neighbour is the cause of my leaving the Church I should, therefore, go on and ask myself a few very important questions: Why, then, did my own sin never before cause me to leave the Church? In what way do my own sins and misdemeanours differ from those of others which cause me such offence? Is it simply because it is I who has committed them? Let us consider these questions each time

we are tempted to pass judgement on others.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen, who wrote that the person who has left the Church as a result of the sins of others did not first enter it for the sake of Christ, proposes a different outlook. What he says is obviously true. The filter through which we observe the world around us, should be Christ and not sin. We should never forget that the Church is not an élite club for the sinless but a hospital for sick sinners. It is possible to be forgiven every sin. It is, however, extremely difficult to escape from our pride and the conviction that we are better than others and should not remain with them in the same community.

Those hypocrites everywhere

Mark Gungor, one of the leading Christian speakers in the world, when talking about men who excuse their non-attendance at Church on the grounds of the hypocrisy of Christians, draws attention to the fact that this is not actually a question of other people’s faults or sins. People who excuse themselves in this way feel that if they themselves began to listen to the Word of God they would



Josh Applegate www.unsplash.com

have to put the Faith into practice. They know, however, that their own lives do not reflect Christian values and for them to do so would entail a huge effort of which they may not be capable. They would have to acknowledge that they themselves are hypocrites, and so, just in case, they prefer to stay outside the Church, justifying this on the basis of the bad behaviour of others.

It is as implausible as a school pupil deciding to quit school on account of his classmates failing their tests because they don't make the effort to prepare. Have you ever known this to happen? It is highly unlikely, but as far as faith is concerned this kind of thinking is used as a serious argument.

Just to make it clear – I do take sin, and the impact of sin, seriously. I do not think it is right that a Christian should commit sin of any kind. I do assert, however, that justifying one's leaving the Church or the Faith based on other people's sin, particularly the kind of sin one commits oneself, is an easy get-out clause. A person looking for an excuse will always find one. A person wishing to quit the Church will always find one, too.

I am a Christian and so sin is not foreign to me

The Bible is full of stories of great sinners whom God called to accomplish some major task. The example of Paul of Tarsus is sufficient to illustrate this point. Before Paul became Paul he was Saul of Tarsus and a Pharisee. His main concern at the time was persecuting Christians and having them put to death. He was converted on the road to Damascus, while still carrying a warrant to arrest disciples of Jesus of Nazareth in his pocket. This was no kind and pleasant man. It says of him that he "was still breathing threats of murder against the Lord's disciples" (Acts 9:1). The Lord makes odd choices from our perspective.

Imagine the situation: you had just read about a man whom all Christians feared and who persecuted and murdered them. This man had blood on his hands and was filled with a lust to kill. Each of us needs to imagine such a person. God looked at this very person and said of him: "This man is my chosen instrument to bring my name

before gentiles and kings" (Acts 9:15). Soon after, someone tells you that they left the Church because of a priest who had an affair. Directing him or her to this example from Scripture may be a fitting response to enable the person to think again about his or her own actions and the reasons behind them.

Holy sinners

I would recommend reading a passage from the novel "The Power and the Glory", by Graham Greene, to all who have difficulty with "sinful priests". The hero of the story is a priest who, during the religious persecution in Mexico in the 1930s, attempts to escape a death sentence. He is an alcoholic and a coward. On top of this, he has a child by a peasant woman. When he is captured by the army, he has some extraordinary and powerful words to say to the lieutenant: "It's no good your working for your end unless you're a good man yourself. And there won't always be good men in your party. Then you'll have all the old starvation, beating, get-rich-anyhow. But it doesn't matter so much my being a coward – and all the rest. I can put God into a man's mouth just the same – and I can give him God's pardon. It wouldn't make any difference to that if every person in the Church was the same."

It is not we who are important in all this. Without God, our sins will be the cause of our damnation, as we will be unable to free ourselves of them. In the same way, without God, by focusing on other people's sins we fail to look at people through the eyes of God.

Tomasz Powyszyński, Poland

Blessed are those who cry

“As he went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?’

‘Neither he nor his parents sinned,’ Jesus answered. ‘He was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him’”

(John 9:1-3).



In these days the whole world suffers from the Covid-19 virus. One could ask, “Very well, Lord, those who suffer and die from this disease, have they sinned and this is to punish them?”

Jesus Christ warns us against formulating easy judgements and making one-to-one connections between suffering and punishment. Job was a saintly man subjected to a terrible experience. Was he a hardened sinner? The tower of Siloam fell, killing eighteen people. Were they hardened sinners? And the Galileans massacred by Pilate, were they hardened sinners? Jesus Christ answers, “They were not, I tell you” (Luke 13: 1-5). St Faustina Kowalska, the Apostle of Divine Mercy, suffered from tuberculosis, which was epidemic at that time.

Eyes of faith

We need to look at the pandemic with different eyes, eyes of faith. Let us meditate on the sense of sight. We should thank God for our eyes.

Many creatures have better sight than humans. The eagle’s eye is among the keenest in the animal kingdom, with an eyesight estimated at 4 to 8 times better than that of the average human. An eagle is said to be able to spot a rabbit 3.2 km away.

Our eyes are so precious that they are protected by eyebrows, eyelids and eyelashes. The tear gland constantly keeps the eyeball moist. Those of you who suffer from a dry eye know the pain and difficulty in everyday life as a result.

Thank God for tears

Tears are also the gift of God. Christ wept when he learned about the death of Lazarus, he wept over Jerusalem, and in the Garden of Gethsemane. There is nothing wrong in crying. If Christ cried, it means it is important. We have to cry. Blessed are those who cry. St Augustine, upon returning home after his mother’s funeral, threw

himself on a bed and cried for a long time. Later he thanked God for tears because it helped calm down his trembling nervous system.

You have to cry in life. You have to let people cry: do not say ‘no’ to their tears. Be next to the crying like the angels.

Human eyes can touch one’s heart to some extent. An attentive gaze allows one to notice the richness of spirit, as well as those aspects a person is ashamed of. Eyes show both joy and pain. Eyes may be great tools for good deeds. We all remember St John Paul II who used to look into one’s eyes for a long time. God does not look at us like a suspicious policeman or law enforcement officer but like someone in love with us. God does not stay at the merely visible: He sees deeply into our hearts. He has full vision of us. Humans cannot do it, they cannot read others’ hearts, not completely. That is why all judgements are reserved only to God. He treats each of us individually.

On the other hand, eyes may also be tools for evil deeds. A temptation

gets into a heart through the eyes. We need to be careful what our eyes look for. It is our choice what we watch so that it won't hurt us. "Food" for our intellect and heart comes through our eyes. Not everything we look at brings us good health. Eyes may be a cause of sin. Christ says that if you are in such a situation it is better to remove the eye and become blind in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. He is quite strict about it: abstain from anything bad that may enslave and hurt you.

Our spiritual sight

In the Sacrament of Baptism we are given eyes of faith. We can look at reality from God's perspective. Our spiritual sight is even more important than the physical one. We exercise this kind of sight on a daily basis. And every time we face some difficulties or bad times we may use it to discover God's presence in these situations. Then we do not have to succumb to despair or bitterness for we are sure God is with us in the very core of a trial.

And finally, the eyes of angels. Angels look at God constantly in heaven and recognise His presence in our physical world too.

Let us ask Our Lord for such eyes.

Jesus, enlighten our physical and spiritual eyes, for You, and only You, are the Light. Amen.

God bless you all.

Fr Peter Prusakiewicz CSMA

Prayer to St Michael

O Heavenly Prince, St Michael, guardian warrior and defender of the children of God.

We call on you in this time of doubt, confusion and fear to banish and defeat the coronavirus and send it into the abyss so that no plans, traps or snares of evil may torment the children of God.

Under your care and protection no harm will come our way. We promise to praise and adore God

all the days of our lives as you and the choirs of angels have done since the beginning, until the Son of Man comes again.

Through your intercession O heavenly Prince and the Blessed Virgin Mary, we make our prayers to the most Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Liam Curran, Co. Donegal, Ireland



■ The Icon of St Michael by Vivian Imbruglia, St Peter & St Paul Catholic Church, Atta Loma, California, USA

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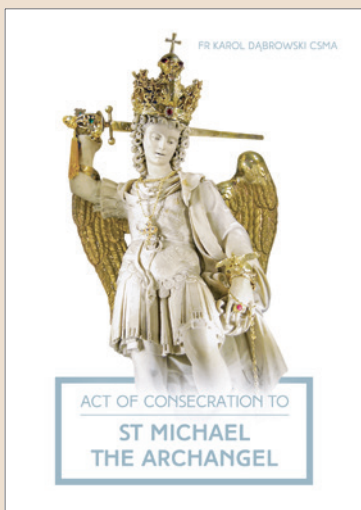
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Father Peter Pruszkiewicz CSMA
Coordinator of the Angels' Mission from a young age
General Secretary of the Shrine of St Michael the Archangel
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His love of and awareness of the significance of his mission to the whole of humanity has caused St Michael the Archangel, in the form of the copy of the figure from the miraculous grotto in Monte Sant' Angelo in Italy, using the Michaelites as his agents, to set out on a journey to meet people. Poland, where he has hitherto visited over 800 parishes, has been particularly marked out in his mission. By means of his presence in particular places in our country, he stands close to each person and intercedes for them: grounding them in the faith, making them aware of the good, supports them in prioritising right values in their lives, convinces the doubtful, strengthens the weak, brings unity to married couples and families, extricates souls mired in sin, restoring the purity of their hearts, frees people from captivity. Over 375,000 people, convinced of the effectiveness of



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Part of the foreword by Fr **Dariusz Wilk**
Superior General of the Congregation of
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TO ORDER, WRITE OR SUBSCRIBE

Main Contacts

Chief Editor

Fr **Peter Prusakiewicz** CSMA
The Angel Magazine – Head Office
The Congregation
of St Michael the Archangel
ul. Pilsudskiego 248/252
05-261 Marki, Warsaw, Poland
Email: redakcja.kjb@gmail.com

Deputy Editor and Chief Co-ordinator Ireland, UK and all countries except Canada and USA

Noreen Bavister

P.O. Box 4332 Harlington
Dunstable Beds, LU6 9DG U.K.
Email: holyangelsinfo@gmail.com
Phone: +44(0)7795-318-605
www.stmichaelthearchangel.info

CANADA CSMA Office

Fr **Matthew Sobierajski** CSMA

2751 Sunningdale Rd. W.
London, ON, N6H 5L2, Canada
Email: theangels@stmichael.com
www.stmichael.com/shop

USA CSMA Office

Colleen Keelan

The Angel Magazine
1401 Whittier Road,
Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230, USA
Phone: +1-313-647-5072
Email: theangelsmagazine.usa@gmail.com
www.stmichaelthearchangel.us

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Chaplet of St Michael

L. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

A. *Amen*

Say the following prayer on the medal:

O God, come to my assistance.

O Lord, make haste to help me.

Glory be to the Father, etc.

1. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Seraphim, may the Lord make us worthy to burn with the fire of perfect charity. Amen.

(1 Our Father on the first large bead, 3 Hail Marys on the next three small beads)

2. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Cherubim, may the Lord vouchsafe to grant us grace to leave the ways of wickedness, to run in the paths of Christian perfection. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

3. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Thrones, may the Lord infuse into our hearts a true and sincere spirit of humility. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

4. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Dominions, may the Lord give us grace to govern our senses and subdue our unruly passions. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

5. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Powers, may the Lord vouchsafe to protect our souls against the snares and temptations of the Devil. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

6. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Virtues, may the Lord deliver us from evil and suffer us not to fall into temptation. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

7. By the intercession of St Michael and the Celestial Choir of Principalities, may God fill our souls with a true spirit of obedience. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

8. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Archangels, may the Lord give us perseverance in faith and in all good works, in order that we gain the glory of Paradise. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

9. By the intercession of St Michael and the celestial Choir of Angels, may the Lord grant us to be



■ St Michael on a wall, Monte Sant'Angelo, Italy

protected by them in this mortal life and conducted hereafter to eternal glory. Amen.

(1 Our Father, 3 Hail Marys)

Recite on the next four beads:

1 Our Father in honour of St Michael

1 Our Father in honour of St Gabriel

1 Our Father in honour of St Raphael

1 Our Father in honour of our Guardian Angel

O glorious prince, St Michael, chief and commander of the heavenly hosts, guardian of souls, vanquisher of rebel spirits, servant in the house of the Divine King, and our admirable conductor, who shines with excellence and superhuman virtue, vouchsafe to deliver us from evil, who turn to you with confidence, and enable us by your gracious protection to serve God more and more faithfully every day. Amen.

Prayer of Pope Leo XIII

Saint 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 Divine Power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who wander throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.