



A Catholic Magazine on the Holy Angels | Vol 15 • issue 4 • 2024 | £ 2,50 € 3,00 \$ 7,00 | ISSN 2081-5077

# The Angels

Messengers from a loving God

## What is the Oil of St Michael?

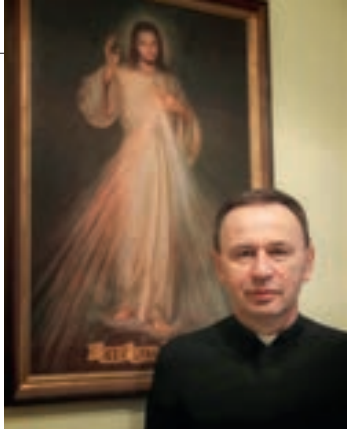
Canadian Mystic  
and Musician

Hidden Life  
of Christ

Graces for free  
– an interview with  
Sr. Gaudia Skass ISMM



# God needs us. Jesus said to St Faustina “Help me, my daughter, to save souls” (Diary 1032)



**G**od is omnipotently powerful but he needs us human beings. God needed John the Baptist to fulfil his mission and prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The Lord wants us to be in the shade, invisible in the background like St John the Baptist. It's easy for us to think of John the Baptist as simply the forerunner and herald of Jesus Christ, but he was quite famous in his own right.

Two points make this very clear:

- 1) People's hearts were touched by his talks. The movement he began ended up having followers in distant lands. This was through the preaching of individuals who spread his message elsewhere outside of Israel.
- 2) We have information about him from outside the New Testament.

Sometimes we can feel very unworthy, even too little, or sinful but God wants us to be His instruments. He does not send the angels and St Michael does not appear to the people, He sends us. So we need to trust that if we are sent, we have the anointing

of the Holy Spirit of certain missions in our lives.

In order to grow spiritually and mature in our faith and holiness we must draw near to God so he can lead and shape us. We cannot mature on our own; we are dependent on Him and know our growth comes through abiding in Christ – dependency on Christ alone – and obedience to His command to love God and love others and to trust.

When Jesus came St John the Baptist, he did not want to be the centre of attention, but stay humbly in the background out of sight just like St Michael 'Who is like unto God'.

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

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## The Angels

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A Catholic Quarterly Magazine on Holy Angels

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# What Is the Oil of St Michael the Archangel?

I looked up at the grotto of apparitions. In front of me was a group of several hundred people waiting to be anointed. It was January 2024. After more than sixteen centuries, I was given the opportunity to consecrate the oil of St Michael the Archangel. The small bottles spread out in the basket glowed with an unusual radiance. I saw the same radiance in the eyes of the people who approached in faith and asked for a few drops of oil.

I prayed to the Angel of the Gargano that this new sign would awaken love and hope in people. I asked that trust in his intercession would be rewarded with healing, liberation and empowerment. This was the beginning of a new form of worship that we now call the Oil of St Michael the Archangel.

## The Efficacy and Composition of the Beautiful Fragrance

God knows how to surprise. Every time I pick up a bottle of the oil I look forward to seeing what it will do. At first I only intended to use it in my retreat ministry, but when I saw how much interest there was in this unusual liquid, I began to ask others what they thought about spreading the idea of blessing the oil in honour of St Michael the Archangel. It turned out that many people were waiting for this new sign of the activity of the Prince of Angels. Even then, at the

Shrine in Gargano, the blessing of the oil attracted crowds. Everyone wanted to know the composition, the beautiful fragrance, the meaning and above all the efficacy of this form of devotion. A few months ago an article appeared in our magazine giving the biblical and historical context of the anointing with oil. At the time, I was not quite sure whether such oil was necessary and how to anoint it effectively. I sent a request for approval of the prayer of blessing to the Metropolitan Curia in the Archdiocese of Przemyśl, Poland. The positive answer from Archbishop Adam Szal came on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

The first mention of the oil of St Michael the Archangel appears in Constantinople, mentioned by the historian Sozomen in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The anointing oil was taken from a lamp that burned continuously in front of an icon of St Michael in a monastery. Numerous testimonies attest to its healing properties.



## The Miracles that Took Place

It is worth quoting Sozomen's detailed account in the *'History of the Church'*, in the chapter entitled *'On the temples built by Constantine the Great and on the city bearing his name: how it was founded and the buildings erected in it'*, and finally on the church of Archangel Michael in the Sosthenium and the miracles that took place there:

"And when he had thus endeavoured in all things to make the city which bore his name a city equal to the Italian Rome, he had attained his end. For, by the grace of God, the new capital has grown and developed to such an extent that, as everyone agrees, it surpasses the former in both population and wealth. I attribute these achievements to the piety of the founder and of the city he founded, and also to the mercy and generosity of its inhabitants towards the poor. For this city is so able to win

sympathy for the faith in Christ that many Jews and almost all pagans embrace Christianity there. And because it became the capital just at the time when the Christian religion had

grown in numbers, it knew neither pagan altars nor temples nor sacrifices, unless we disregard the fact that attempts in this direction were later made for a time by the Emperor Julian, and immediately died out. Constantine, therefore, showered this new city of Christ, and at the same time the city to which he gave his own name, with honours and adorned it with numerous and great temples.

“God himself also supported the emperor’s zeal, and through his revelations gave assurance that the churches scattered around the city were holy and brought salvation. The church that became most famous at that time, both to strangers and to the inhabitants of the city, was the church that stood on the site once called Hestiai. It is now called Michaelion, and those who sail from Pont to Constantinople have it on their right, with a distance of about thirty-five stadia separating the sailor from it and more than seventy stadia separating the walker who circles the strait in the middle. The area was given its present name because, according to popular belief, Michael, the archangel of God, is said to have appeared there. And having experienced a great blessing myself, I fully agree that this is true. Moreover, it has been proved by the experience of a whole series of tangible facts, also by others. Some, surprised by terrible accidents or dangers from which there is no escape, others, plagued by sickness and unprecedented suffering, found deliverance from misfortune after praying to God there. It would take too long to recount in detail what happened, how and to whom.”

## St James Words are Engraved above the Door

These stories intrigued me and I began to search the books of the Old Testament for the first mention of the use of oil in a sacred text. It quickly became apparent that the book of Genesis mentions an unusual oil and the stone that was anointed with it. In the 28th chapter of that book we read: “When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.’ And he departed with trembling, and said: ‘O that this place is terrifying! Surely this is the house of God and the gate of heaven!’ So when he got up in the morning, he took the stone he had put under his head, set it up as a stele and poured oil on it” (vv. 16-18).

A chill went through me as I understood the meaning of this text. The words of St James are engraved above the door of the Sanctuary of St Michael the Archangel on the Gargano. They clearly refer to an apparition that took place there in ancient times. Stone and oil were connected in a bizarre way. First, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Bishop Pucinelli asked the locals to take stones from the grotto, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the oil consecrated by the missionaries appears in the same grotto. Oil and stone complete their symbolism. The stone gives strength, durability and is a symbol of Christ. The oil smoothes, gives radiance, brings comfort, heals wounds and is a sign of mercy. When asked by the faithful about its composition and production, I said that the oil of St Michael the Archangel consists of very simple ingredients. They are: vegetable oil and essential extracts of rose and geranium.

Oil was used for cultic purposes by the Greeks, Romans and in the Old

Testament. Christianity did not refer to the religious but to the secular use of oil. People in the Mediterranean cultural area used oil as a food, as a cosmetic, as a source of light and as a medicine to heal wounds. In addition, wrestlers rubbed oil on themselves during competitions to increase their agility and make it easier to slip past their opponents. All these uses of oil found their way into the liturgy. People valued oil for its healing properties. It was therefore a suitable material for the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. The anointing of the sick is the strengthening of a person for the final battle against Satan, so that he can ‘slip’ out of his snare. Since sin, as a disease of the soul, was considered to be the work of Satan, oil was used in the sacraments that took away sin, i.e. baptism, the sacrament of the sick, and for a time also in the sacrament of penance (Syria, Gaul).

## Roses and Geraniums

The scent of roses and geraniums, a characteristic feature of the oil, should also be mentioned here. The technique of distilling rose flowers was invented in Persia in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. The main rose used in the production of rose oil was the Damascus rose. The rich symbolism of the rose alludes to love, beauty, perfection, but also blood. In religious paintings, the rose takes on a different meaning, referring to martyrdom, forgiveness and resurrection, all with rose thorns.

As for the geranium, it is important to mention that our ancestors liked to use it to prepare medicinal infusions for various respiratory infections. Freshly picked and crushed leaves were also used as a remedy for skin diseases, middle ear infections and



■ Monte Sant'Angelo at night

as an ingredient in skin care mixtures. Geranium leaves contain essential oils with antiviral, antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties, and also have a mild sedative effect. Freshly picked leaves can help with a sore ear or a bad runny nose: simply crush the leaf to release the juice, then place it flat in the nose or ear. The geranium also has a remarkable place in popular tradition. It symbolises purity, innocence, healing power and deep spirituality.

## Testimonies of Healing

Just a few days after the blessing, I began to receive testimonies of the effectiveness of the oil. On one occasion, a friend wrote a touching text message asking for prayers for a little girl. A few days later she described in detail the miraculous healing of the child: "Good Lord, today eleven-year-old Gabrysia, whose aneurysm in her head burst three weeks ago, came out of the hospital. My neighbour was heartbroken (she is a close friend). She knew I went to church and asked me to pray for her. In tears she told me what had happened. I gave her the oil of St Michael. I told her to anoint the whole body of the child – everything possible: head, arms, legs. But she doubted that this would be possible, since Gabriela was

in intensive care. I suggested that she ask the nurse for an anointing. She took the oil to the hospital the same day. It was Saturday and on Monday Gabrysia woke up! In the meantime, she had undergone tests and the doctors were planning several operations to save her. As it turned out, the child's condition surprised everyone. The doctors no longer needed to operate. A neighbour came to see me. She told me directly that she was grateful to God and St Michael for saving Gabrysia."

## Pray with Faith to Jesus Christ

This story proves to me that the oil of Saint Michael the Archangel is extremely necessary for the world and for people. At the same time, I would like to emphasise that its effect is not magical! It is about faith in Jesus Christ, who is our Saviour and who wants the good of all. God can use an object to persuade people to believe, to pray, to love. Man responds to this call with devotion.

In this context, it is important to recall the statement in the Directory for Popular Piety and the Liturgy, published by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments: "Liturgy and popular

piety are two forms of worship and should be in a reciprocal and fruitful relationship; in any case, the liturgy must be the point of reference in order to guide clearly and prudently the spirit of prayer and charismatic life manifested in popular piety. On the other hand, popular piety, with its symbolic and expressive values, can contribute to the effective inculturation of the liturgy and positively influence its creative dynamism" (n. 58).

Of particular recent interest for Michaelite devotion are the Oil of St Michael the Archangel, the Stone from the Grotto of Gargano and the booklet *'The Great Entrustment to St Michael the Archangel'*. All these forms of devotion complement each other and show that St Michael the Archangel is far from having finished his mission of showing people ways to fight evil and, ultimately, to follow Christ with fervour.

The prayer included in the rite of the blessing of the oil confirms this: "Almighty God, whom the hordes of angels tremblingly serve and whose heavenly ministry we praise, we ask You to look graciously upon this oil which we have received through Your mercy, and to bless and sanctify it. You have given it to us for anointing, so that we may sing a song of thanksgiving to You, the living and true God. Grant that those who use this oil, which we bless in Your Name, may be delivered from all suffering, sickness and the snares of their enemies. May it serve to ward off all afflictions from man, whom You have created in Your image and redeemed with the priceless blood of Your Son, so that he may no longer suffer from the wound inflicted by the ancient serpent."

Fr Matthew Szerszeń CSMA



# The Power of St Michael's Oil

**Do you know that we have been getting miracles in Scotland.**

I read the bi-fold leaflet by Fr Matthew Szerszeń CSMA and received five St Michael oils and Certificates of Authenticity from Noreen just before the Feast of the Archangels and found it to be incredibly, incredibly powerful.

The first day I had only dispensed the oil to about 20 people and the very first person to receive it had come into the church with a lot of pain all over the body. They immediately felt a fire going through their body as the oil was applied and were actually very overcome with the power. They suddenly noticed that their pain had dispersed and they left the church completely pain free, as well as being uplifted.

## The Minute the Oil Hit his Head

The third person, a man was completely cured of depression. When I applied the oil, I immediately saw his face changing before my eyes with the brightness, and he suddenly smiled, and said "this has just completely changed my low mood in a split second". He reported that he was extremely happy and had been cured of a despondent heart.



We then applied the oil to a Protestant lady who is discerning a potential calling to come into the Catholic Church. When I applied the oil, she could feel sparks of electricity going through her body, and she was struck with awe in a way that could have influenced her decision swiftly to become a Catholic.

Then it was applied in the church to about 15 people and four of those people actually visibly shook with a sensation of fire going through them, and they could not stand properly afterwards.

The strongest sensation was a lady that completely lost consciousness

because of the power of the oil and we had to give her a few minutes to rouse.

She later told me of her miraculous healing: "That is the first time in 16 years I am pain free. I've always been in pain and never knew anything else. Thanks and praise to God and St Michael."

**Fr Andrew Marshall**

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# I Will Follow You



■ Blessed Fr Bronisław Markiewicz CSMA

There is a beautiful word in the Old Testament to describe biblical faith, the word *'aman* (אָמַן). It has many meanings, including 1) taking someone's hand and holding it tightly while going through life, 2) being strong, 3) remaining faithful to the end.

Those who know the life of Fr Markiewicz will easily discover that he is such a model of a living, strong, personal faith. He received his faith from his parents. It was a good, deep and traditional faith, but it turned out that at a certain point even this kind of faith was not enough for him.

## A Moment When he Met Jesus Personally

Full of doubt, he denied God and walked away from his relationship with the Lord. But there was a moment when he met Jesus personally. Only then did young Bronisław take the Lord's hand and only then could he say: "I will follow you wherever you lead me, wherever you want me to go". It was a strong faith that did not shrink from anything. It was a faith that was not afraid to leave everything that was familiar, important and precious, like leaving his homeland and going to Italy.

In the life of Blessed Bronisław Markiewicz we see three stages of true faith: the personal encounter with Jesus, the journey through life, and fidelity to the end.

For our Founder, faith was a light that allowed him to see everything in a different way.

## Divine Crepuscular Rays Shone Through

When Fr Markiewicz died at the end of January 1912, it was a very cold day. Heavy leaden clouds covered the sky and hung over the vicarage where he was staying. The biographer wrote that at his last moments a ray of light broke through the clouds and the window and illuminated the priest's face. It seemed to be a divine sign of confirmation that he was living the faith as his light.

Fr Christopher Poświata CSMA,  
Poland

## Quotes by Bl. Fr Markiewicz

My ultimate goal: the kingdom of heaven, to attain eternal life. My current goal; purity of heart, serving in purity and holiness of God.

\* \* \*

The most perfect God, therefore, deserves to be served with all my might, to the detriment of my health, even if I were to lose my life, even though my salvation may be uncertain according to a certain great saint.

\* \* \*

To strive for oneself – is your first obligation. You have to be like a pond that gives water to a stream and the creatures within it, but does not itself run dry; not a canal serving only to pour water for other streams.

\* \* \*

In the heart of Jesus, I will find how to follow Him. He will give me the grace to imitate Him in the most perfect way.

\* \* \*

I could be a holy priest if I said the Holy Mass and the breviary perfectly. Do it slowly, quietly and thoroughly. To say little but to say it well.

\* \* \*

Let me learn and be aware of the price and value of the soul in the eyes of God!

Quotes from *Daily Reflections with Blessed Bronisław Markiewicz*

# To Be the Salt and Light of Jesus

**Who among you would gladly eat a spoonful of salt?**

Probably no one, because it is very salty. If salt is so bad, why does Jesus want us to be the salt of the earth? Because salt gives flavour to dishes. What else is salt used for? Salt also preserves food, that is, it protects it from spoilage. If we sprinkle some meat with salt, it becomes valuable for longer.

In the Gospel, (Matthew 5: 13-16) Jesus asks us to give everything that we lack in life with our attitude, good deeds and people we meet. So what can people lack in life? Love, kindness and friendship.

The Lord Jesus also asks us to be what we are? Yes. The light of the world. What is light used for? To illuminate the darkness and show the way. When it is dark, then we have a problem to reach a goal. I brought you a flashlight that is used to illuminate the road. If we have light, we will reach our destination very quickly. When a friend does not know how to act in everyday life struggles, thanks to the fact that we are and can help, we become a light for them. If a friend sees that we go to church, they will also go. To be a light for someone is to show another person how to behave in life in order to be a good person.



Picture generated by AI

No one lights a lamp to put it under a basket because it is pointless. If someone turns on the light, it is so that everyone can see it.

It should be the same in our lives. Our talents and our faith are there for all to see and at the same time to imitate them. Our talents and abilities are not only for us, but also to serve others and be a signpost and light for them.

Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We

will be like this only if we add flavour to our lives with good deeds and sound salt and illuminate the darkness of our earthly journey with the light that comes from God. In this way, through our actions, our being light and salt, we can help other people to see the Father, experience His goodness and come to Him.

Fr Gregory Flis CSMA



# “I Grant Even More Graces Than They Ask”



**The word ‘grace’ appears over 600 times in the Diary as well as the desire expressed by the Lord Jesus to give grace to people.**

**What is grace? How would you explain it to a modern person? Why is it worthwhile to come for grace? Can we not do without it?**

We certainly cannot do without it. Someone might say: “I have done without grace for thirty years”. But this is just an illusion followed by a moment when the scales fall from your eyes, when the world you have built up over the years falls apart in three seconds and all that remains is a sense of futility. Without God’s grace, such dramas happen.

I would define grace as the strength to follow God’s voice, to pursue what He wants and has wanted in my life. His plan is the best scenario for my life. Grace is also the ability to choose the good and follow it. Good people sometimes make mistakes in life, they also suffer, and what they have been building for ten years can collapse in an instant. But the person who has built in cooperation with God’s grace will then realise: “OK, apparently it was only necessary for ten years.”

**That is, according to what Sister says, God’s grace is a special strength to follow Him. But the Lord Jesus said to Sr Faustina: “I grant even more graces than they ask” (Diary 1146). How can we understand this?**

Grace could be called even more general than power. I think that power can only be a manifestation of grace. If you have grace, you have power. But when you have grace, you also receive many other gifts: light, understanding, and so on. It is best to relate this to the Holy Spirit who is the giver of these graces. He is that grace, the love that unites the Father and the Son, and the one who wants to give himself to us in the form of different graces and gifts. One of them is power, but there is also the grace to understand more deeply, to persevere, to love.

If you have received a grace, it means that you have received more of what the grace is about. When I love, I can always love more. If I persevere,

I can always be more persevering. God is the infinity of all graces, so He can always give us more.

**We talk about grace in relation to temporal things, like passing an exam, raising children well, but we also talk about grace in the supernatural dimension...**

It is the kind of grace that goes with us into eternity. Although everything goes with us into eternity because eternity starts here. Even things like the exam I have just passed will be part of my history that will go with me into eternity and I will thank the Lord God for that grace. Because grace is always something greater than matter. Perhaps this exam I have passed has in some way strengthened my relationship with God? Maybe it was because of it that I volunteered to help the homeless, for example, in a burst of gratitude? In my opinion, we should not separate temporal life from eternal life. The temporal is also part of the eternal and always has a spiritual dimension.

**Sr Gaudia Skass ISMM**

interviewed by

**Fr Peter Prusakiewicz CSMA**

# The Importance Of Mary



■ The Immaculate Conception  
by Bartolomé Esteban Pérez Murillo,  
circa 1680

**H**ad there been no Mary, there would have been no Jesus. In God's economy of salvation she was so important to Him and us. Our first parents sinned and had closed the gates of heaven from us. The whole human race was banished from Paradise.

But God in His infinite love and mercy would not let this continue forever. In the presence of our first parents and Satan, He pronounced these words which remain a marvellous ray of hope for each one of us, "I will put enmity between you (Satan) and the woman (Mary), and between your offspring and hers; it

**On 8<sup>th</sup> December we celebrate the Immaculate Conception.**

will bruise your head and you will strike its heel."

And so it was just over 2000 years ago a Jewish couple called Joachim and Anne conceived a little girl whom they called Mary. She was conceived immaculate. From the very first moment of her existence she was sinless. It would not be fitting if Satan, even for the briefest moment, were to have had dominion over her for she was destined, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to conceive God's Son whom she and her husband Joseph were to call Jesus, and who was to save us from our sins.

This is the solemnity we keep in December, the Immaculate Conception. It is the tradition of the Church that Jesus became man to save us from our sins. But there is another school of thought, propounded by a much loved Franciscan, Blessed John Duns Scotus, which maintains that even if humanity had never sinned God's Son would still have become man because it was always the will of God that He should be loved perfectly by one of His creatures. This came about when His Son offered to become man so that He could be the perfect creature to love Him.

So according to the traditional approach, Christ is God's response to the problem of sin. Some theologians concluded that had Adam and Eve not sinned, Jesus would not

have come into this world, since a redeemer would not have been necessary. This conclusion makes God's action a consequence of sin. Duns Scotus could not accept such reasoning. His theology insists on the total freedom of the Divine Will and love and, therefore, the Incarnation must be a completely free and intentional act of God's love. He writes that Christ, the 'highest good' in creation, could not exist on account of a 'lesser good', that is, sin.

Scotus explains that when God willed creation the primary goal He had in mind was the perfect union of God's being with a created being, which was to be achieved in Jesus Christ who, therefore, has primacy in the mind of the Creator. In fact, He is the reason for creation. This means that Christ is not an afterthought of God, conceived to deal with sin, but the idea on which creation itself depends.

In order for His Son to become the perfect man, God needed a perfect human being as mother and that was Mary. He gave her the unique privilege of being conceived without the stain of original sin. This is the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

**Fr Francis Maple OFM Cap,**  
The Franciscan Friary,  
15 Cuppin Street, Chester,  
Cheshire CH1 2BN, UK

# Prayer to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Oh, Immaculate Heart! Help us to conquer the menace of evil, which so easily takes root in the hearts of the people of today, and whose immeasurable effects already weigh down upon our modern world and seem to block the paths towards the future!

*From famine and war, deliver us.  
From nuclear war, from incalculable self-destruction, from every kind of war, deliver us.*

*From sins against the life of man from its very beginning, deliver us.*

*From hatred and from the demeaning of the dignity of the children of God, deliver us.*

*From every kind of injustice in the life of society, both national and international, deliver us.*

*From readiness to trample on the commandments of God, deliver us.*

*From sins against the Holy Spirit, deliver us.*

*Accept, O Mother of Christ, this cry laden with the sufferings of all individual human beings, laden with the sufferings of whole societies.*

*Let there be revealed once more in the history of the world the infinite power of merciful Love. May it put a stop to evil.*

*May it transform consciences. May your Immaculate Heart reveal for all the light of hope! Amen.*

**Pope John Paul II**

Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, 1982



■ St Faustina and Merciful Jesus

## Gift of Divine Presence

**We usually associate St Faustina Kowalska with the risen and glorified Christ depicted in The Divine Mercy image. Yet few saints in the history of the Church were as devoted to the Child Jesus as St Faustina.**

**W**hile she particularly remembered the Christ Child at Christmastime, He was a living presence that she grew to appreciate throughout the year – a constant source of inspiration and joy.

### Joy and Wonder in His Presence

In fact, sometimes Jesus appeared to St Faustina as a child with no other clear purpose than to express His tender love for her and rejoice her heart. It became a gift of the Divine Presence. On Christmas Eve in 1937, for example, St Faustina writes of one such encounter with the Holy Child: *When I arrived at Midnight Mass, from*

*the very beginning I steeped myself in deep recollection, during which time I saw the stable of Bethlehem filled with great radiance. The Blessed Virgin, all lost in the deepest of love, was wrapping Jesus in swaddling clothes, but Saint Joseph was still asleep. Only after the Mother of God put Jesus in the manger did the light of God awaken Joseph, who also prayed. But after a while, I was left alone with the Infant Jesus who stretched out His little hands to me, and I understood that I was to take Him in my arms. Jesus pressed His head against my heart and gave me to know, by His profound gaze, how good He found it to be next to my heart (Diary, 1442).*

**Dr Robert Stackpole, STD**



# Hidden Life of Christ

**The Creed speaks primarily about Jesus' conception, birth, passion, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension. Yet, every moment of His hidden life shines light on these central mysteries, revealing the fullness of God's plan.**

Christ's life is more than a series of events; it is a divine tapestry woven with the threads of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery.

The Gospels, written by those who first embraced the faith, capture glimpses of Jesus' mystery. From His humble birth to His redemptive Passion, everything in His life serves as a sign of His divine nature. His words, miracles and actions all point to His identity as the Son of God and Saviour, making His humanity a sacrament that leads us to the divine.

Every facet of Jesus' life, from His silences to His sufferings, is a revelation of the Father. His obedience to the Father's will, even in the smallest details, manifests God's immense love for us. Jesus' entire existence is a mystery of redemption, from His humble birth to His sacrificial death on the cross.

In His hidden life, through His words, healings and ultimately His resurrection, Jesus redeems us. His life recapitulates the history of humanity, restoring what was lost through Adam. By experiencing all stages of human life, Jesus unites us with God, offering us a shortcut to salvation.

## The Preparation and Infancy

God prepared for the coming of His Son over centuries, weaving together the Old Testament prophecies and

awakening a longing in human hearts. John the Baptist, the immediate precursor, heralded Jesus' arrival, calling people to repentance and recognising Jesus as the Lamb of God. He rejoiced and welcomed the Incarnated Word from the very womb of his mother.

The Church celebrates Advent, sharing in this ancient expectation and preparing for Jesus' second coming. By commemorating John the Baptist's birth and martyrdom, the Church embraces his mission: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30).

## The Christmas Mystery and Early Life

Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family, with shepherds as the first witnesses. In this simplicity, the glory of God was revealed. To enter the kingdom of God, we too must become like children, embracing humility and being born anew in Christ. The mystery of Christmas is a marvellous exchange: the Creator becoming man so that we might share in His divinity. "O marvellous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity" (LH, 1 January, Antiphon I of Evening Prayer).

Jesus' circumcision and presentation in the temple show His obedience

to the Law and dedication to God. It is a sign of His belonging to Abraham's descendants, to the people of the covenant.

The Epiphany celebrates the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. The magi, representing neighbouring pagan religions, are seen in the Gospel as the first non-Jews to acknowledge Jesus. Their journey to Jerusalem to honour the King of the Jews signifies their search for the one who will rule all nations.

It reveals Him as the firstborn Son who belongs to the Lord. Simeon and Anna, representing all of Israel, eagerly awaited this encounter with the Saviour, a moment celebrated in Byzantine tradition. Jesus is recognised as the long-awaited Messiah, the light to the nations and the glory of Israel, but also as a sign that is spoken against. The sorrow predicted for Mary foreshadows Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross, which brings salvation that God had prepared in the presence of all people.

The flight into Egypt and the massacre of the innocents highlight the opposition between darkness and light: "He came to his own home and his own people received him not" (Jn 1:11). Jesus' life was marked by persecution, a fate shared by His followers. His departure from Egypt recalls the



■ The Holy Family by Rafael Flores, 1857

Exodus, presenting Him as the ultimate liberator of God's people.

## The Hidden Life in Nazareth

For most of His life, Jesus lived in a manner similar to the vast majority of human beings: leading a daily life without evident greatness, engaged in manual labour. His religious life was that of a devout Jew, obedient to the law of God, living within a community. During this time Jesus was obedient to His parents and "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2:51-52).

Jesus' obedience to His mother and legal father perfectly fulfilled the fourth commandment and was a reflection of His filial obedience to His

Father in heaven. His daily obedience to Joseph and Mary both foreshadowed and announced the obedience He would demonstrate on Holy Thursday: "Not my will..." (Lk 22:42). The obedience of Christ in His hidden life was already a work of redemption, reversing the disobedience of Adam.

The hidden life at Nazareth offers everyone the opportunity to connect with Jesus through the most ordinary events of daily life such as silence, family life, and the dignity of labour: "The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus – the school of the Gospel. First, then, a lesson of silence. May esteem for silence, that admirable and indispensable condition of mind, revive in us. . . A lesson on family life. May Nazareth

teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character... A lesson of work. Nazareth, home of the "Carpenter's Son", in you I would choose to understand and proclaim the severe and redeeming law of human work" (Pope Paul VI at Nazareth, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1964: LH, Feast of the Holy Family, OR).

The finding of Jesus in the temple is the only event that interrupts the Gospels' silence about His hidden years. In this event, Jesus reveals His total dedication to His divine mission: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's work?" (Lk 2:49 alt). Mary and Joseph did not understand His words at the time, but they accepted them in faith. Mary kept all these things in her heart throughout the years that Jesus lived a hidden life in the ordinary silence.

## Living in Communion with Jesus

Christ's life is not just a historical account but a living reality that we are invited to share. Every aspect of His life, from His Incarnation to His Resurrection, is meant for us. Jesus lived, suffered and died not for Himself but for our salvation. Even now, He intercedes for us, bringing our lives before the Father.

We are called to imitate Jesus, our perfect model. Through His humility, prayer and acceptance of suffering, He invites us to follow Him. By becoming one with Christ, we share in His life and mysteries, allowing Him to live in us and fulfil His divine plan.

**Agata Pawłowska**

Based on Catechism of the Catholic Church, articles 512-534.

# What's So Painful About Purgatory? (part 4)

**Many saints of the Church testify that the Lord revealed to them that the deepest suffering of the souls in purgatory comes from longing for union with God.**

**F**ather Kenneth Baker, SJ, sums up this testimony in his book *Fundamentals of Catholicism* (vol. 3, p. 375): *The souls in purgatory... know for certain that they are saved; in this they rejoice. But since they need cleansing they are separated from God for a time. This separation is most painful to them, since their whole being longs to be united with God.*

Take, for example, the testimony of St Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510): *God inspires the soul in purgatory with so ardent a movement of devoted love that it would be sufficient to annihilate her were she not immortal. Illumined and inflamed by pure charity, the more she loves God, the more she detests the least stain of sin that displeases Him, the least hindrance that prevents her union with Him... [She is] impelled by the impetuosity of the love which exists between God and herself, in order that she might be the sooner delivered from all that separates her from her sovereign God.*

This same understanding of the suffering of the souls in purgatory was revealed to St Faustina, too, the great Apostle of Divine Mercy, as recorded in her Diary: *I saw my guardian angel who ordered me to follow him. In a*

*moment I was in a misty place full of fire in which there was a great crowd of suffering souls. They were praying fervently, but to no avail, for themselves; only we can come to their aid. The flames which were burning them did not reach me at all. My guardian angel did not leave me for an instant. I asked these souls what their greatest suffering was. They assured me in one voice that their greatest torment was longing for God.* (20)

The vision that St Faustina had of souls suffering in the “flames” of purgatory (which, as we said previously, must refer to a purely spiritual “fire”, because the souls in purgatory do not receive their risen, physical bodies until the final Judgment Day) may simply be a symbolic way of expressing their painful longing for God. The “fire” of longing for God in their hearts must be what purifies them of any remaining attachment to sin. It must be what prepares them for final union with Christ in heaven. And surely, all this happens within them by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is described in the New Testament as the “fire” that came down upon the Church at Pentecost, the fire that St John of the Cross once referred to as “The Living Flame of Love”.

It seems clear that God did not unveil this to his saints primarily in order to frighten them (or us!) about the fires of purgatory. Rather, He revealed these mysteries to the Church in order to fill us with hope, that even if our loved ones died with just a tiny spark of true faith and love in their hearts, the God of mercy can fan that spark into flame and find a way home to heaven for them, too. Moreover, He revealed the state of the souls in purgatory to us to fill us with compassion for them, so that we would be moved to come to their aid. The Catholic Church teaches that to help the souls suffering in purgatory by prayer and other good works is an act of the most sublime charity. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us in entry 1032, the Church “commends almsgiving, indulgences and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead”, and the Catechism quotes St John Chrysostom (344-407) in this regard as well: *Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died, and to offer our prayers for them.*





According to St Augustine, *“One of the holiest works, one of the best exercises of piety that we can practice in this world, is to offer sacrifices, alms, and prayers for the dead”* (Homily 16).

Nothing could be easier for us than to include this daily intention as part of our spiritual life. Here is a simple way to do it: Every time you suffer some cross or misfortune, offer it up to our merciful Saviour in words borrowed from the traditional Morning Offering: “Merciful Jesus, I offer you this cross in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, for all the intentions you had on Your Heart in Your agony and passion, especially for the conversion of sinners, in reparation for my own sins, for the relief of the souls suffering in purgatory, and for our Holy Father’s intentions for this month.”

Another way to do it is to pray at every Mass for the souls suffering in purgatory, “especially for those suffering the longest, and who are most forgotten by their loved ones on earth.”

As Fr Baker pointed out (in the quotation above), let us also not forget the joy of the souls in purgatory. Theirs is not a state of unmitigated longing and penitential sorrow. Rather, souls in the state of purgatory rejoice in the assurance that their process of purification will inevitably lead them to the glorious vision in heaven of the One they love so much.

St Francis De Sales (1567-1622), for example, wrote that just as the pains

of purgatory are severe, so the interior satisfaction and bliss enjoyed by the souls there must surpass anything we can imagine. How wonderful it must be for them when they feel themselves gradually being spiritually healed, gradually being freed from their remaining moral debt to God, and gradually drawing nearer and nearer to the joyful vision of the Blessed Trinity!

Let us close this exploration of purgatory with two quotations that probably capture the heart of this mystery as well as human words can express.

First, many years ago our own Fr Seraphim Michalenko, MIC, wrote the following meditation which holds together in a few paragraphs the paradox of merciful love and justice, suffering and joy, all included in the great mystery of purgatory:

*To whatever extent we become conscious, during our earthly lives, of our inability to rid ourselves completely of whatever blocks us from intimate union with God, we feel [spiritual] pain. We experience a taste of “purgatory”, recognizing how perfectly God loves us, and how imperfectly we love Him in return.*

*In purgatory this pain is heightened, lifted in a sense to infinity, by the Divine Light that reveals to us at once the infinity and purity of Love, and the full extent of our inordinate self-love.*

*We are filled with longing for God, whom we now, more than ever before, realize is the only One who can bring us to the fullness of joy. And we suffer the pain of separation from the object of our*

*longing, knowing that it is a separation caused by our own self-centeredness.*

*But although this is a very real and intense form of suffering, it yet carries with it a character of “sweetness and hope” which we can call purgatorial joy! This joy of souls is the result of having trustingly handed themselves over to God and accepted the purification that arises from their love and longing as their misery truly meets His mercy.*

*Purgatory is our meeting with Christ who loves us, and of our loving acceptance of His pardoning love. It is our passage to holiness. It is not yet heaven, but it is a definite way to it, since the love of God underlies the purifying suffering of souls. The souls in purgatory already definitely belong to God and nothing can separate them from Him.*

The second quote certainly had nothing to do with purgatory when it was first written, because it was penned by an 18<sup>th</sup> century Protestant hymn writer, Charles Wesley. Nevertheless, it sums up beautifully the heart’s longing of all souls in the state of purgation – both in this life, and the life to come:

Finish then Thy new creation  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see Thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in Thee;

Changed from glory into glory  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before Thee  
Lost in wonder, love and praise!

**Dr Robert Stackpole, STD**  
The director of the John Paul II  
Institute of Divine Mercy

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Conception of the B.V.M.

# Blessed Dina Bélanger: The Canadian Mystic and Musician

**Blessed Dina Bélanger (1897–1929), often referred to as the “Lily of Québec”, is a prominent figure in the Catholic Church in Canada. She is known for her deep mysticism, piety and service to the community. Despite living a relatively short life, her spiritual writings and unwavering faith have inspired many, leading to her beatification by Pope John Paul II in 1993.**

**D**ina's story is a testament to the profound connection between faith, music and love for God.

## Early Life and Love for Music

Dina Bélanger was born in Québec City, Canada, on April 30<sup>th</sup> 1897, to devout Catholic parents, Olivier Bélanger and Séraphia Matte. Raised in a nurturing environment, she displayed an early inclination toward prayer, silence and the arts. Music played a particularly significant role in Dina's life. A gifted pianist, she pursued her musical education at the prestigious Institute of Musical Art in New York City. Her time in New York was transformative, not only for her musical development but also for her spiritual life. Living away from home, Dina deepened her personal relationship with God, frequently attending Mass and growing in her desire to serve Him fully.

## Call to the Religious Life

Despite her promising future in music, Dina felt a calling that was stronger than her love for the piano. At the age of 24, she entered the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary, located in Sillery, Québec. As a novice, she took the religious name “Marie Sainte-Cécile of Rome”, after Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians, reflecting her lifelong connection to music and spirituality.

In the convent, Dina embraced a life of humility, service and prayer. Her writings reveal her desire to be united with God in the most intimate way. She expressed her longing for complete self-abandonment to divine love, frequently referring to her desire to disappear so that Christ could fully live in her. Despite the physical suffering she endured due to tuberculosis, Dina remained joyful, offering her pain for the salvation of souls.

## Spiritual Writings and Mystical Experiences

Blessed Dina's mystical experiences set her apart as one of the most extraordinary religious figures in Canadian Catholic history. In her autobiography, *Une vie dans le Christ* (*A Life in Christ*), Dina described a series of profound mystical encounters with Jesus. She spoke of visions, inner locutions (hearing the voice of God) and experiences of spiritual ecstasy. These encounters convinced her of the infinite love of God and His desire to save all souls.

Dina's spirituality was centred on the “Divine Indwelling”, the belief that God lives in the souls of the faithful. She often spoke of allowing Jesus to live in her and through her, a concept that closely aligns with the Catholic teaching of being “transformed in Christ”. Her life of contemplative prayer, self-sacrifice and union with God resonated with



■ Dina Bélanger on the day of her religious profession, August 15, 1923. She took the name Marie Sainte-Cécile-de-Rome.

many who read her writings, and she became known for her deep understanding of Christian mysticism.

## The Final Years: Suffering and Union with God

Dina's health began to deteriorate due to tuberculosis shortly after she entered religious life. She endured immense physical suffering, but her inner peace and joy remained constant. Dina saw her suffering as a way to participate in the passion of Christ and offered it for the sanctification of souls, especially for those who had lost their way.

She died on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1929, at the age of 32. Even in her final moments, she expressed her desire to be completely united with God. Her reputation for holiness quickly spread after her death, and many



began seeking her intercession, believing in her sanctity.

## Beatification and Legacy

Blessed Dina Bélanger was beatified by Pope John Paul II on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1993. Her beatification acknowledged not only her personal sanctity but also the widespread devotion to her intercession. Her autobiography and spiritual writings continue to inspire people across the world, particularly those who seek a deeper understanding of contemplative life and mystical union with God.

In Canada, Blessed Dina is revered as a model of humility, purity and self-sacrifice. Many Canadian Catholics, especially in Québec, pray to her for intercession in matters of health, vocation and personal struggles. Her life story also emphasizes the importance of integrating one's talents – in Dina's case, her musical ability – into a broader spiritual vocation.

## Conclusion

Blessed Dina Bélanger remains an important figure in both Canadian Catholicism and the broader Catholic Church. Her mystical experiences, profound writings and unshakable faith continue to inspire countless people worldwide. She exemplified a life lived in complete surrender to God, showing that even in suffering, one can find profound union with the divine. Dina's legacy endures as a beacon of hope, holiness and the transformative power of love for God.

**Noreen Bavister**

### Sources

1. Dina Bélanger, "A Life in Christ" (Autobiography) – *Une Vie dans le Christ*.
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# Hungry for God

**Let us consider the most important kind of hunger that exists. But it is not always seen or felt. I am talking about the hunger for God Himself.**

**F**irst of all, we need to be reminded of the simplest truth that has been repeated by the Church throughout the centuries that we cannot do anything without God. There are situations in life which are impossible to go through without God. When we are fighting for life, we need doctors. But where life is on the brink of death, the Lord of life and death is needed.

## Jesus Silences the Dog...

Let us remind ourselves of the story about the storm of the lake from Mark 4:35-41. The disciples are in a boat with Jesus, it is night. At one point a wind blows on the surface of the Sea of Galilee, the lake is agitated. The waves hit the boat, it begins to sway and the water pours in. What do the disciples do? They do not wake Jesus up. They don't ask him what to do because they know it perfectly well, they are fishermen. Why would fishermen wake the carpenter? A doctor doesn't take professional advice from a shoemaker, right?

At a certain point, however, the disciples could no longer manage on their own. They wake up Jesus, who, unbeknown to them, is still asleep. They call him 'Master'. I imagine the word as irony: *Don't you care if we perish, master? You spoke beautiful parables, you preached beautiful sermons, and now what, we are going to drown?*

And even if they have little faith in him, they do not want to die alone.

Then Jesus stands up and says two short words, which, when translated mean: 'Quiet now! Be calm!'. In Greek this could be translated as 'Put a muzzle on yourself, don't bark'. We put a muzzle on a dog so that he doesn't bark and threaten people. The storm on the lake is like a barking dog. It is barking at the disciples as if to say, 'I will surely devour you, you will perish, you will surely fail, you will die'. And the disciples are afraid of this storm as a man is afraid of a barking dog. And Jesus' words to the lake mean: 'Be quiet. Act as if you had a muzzle on your mouth. Don't bark at them. Go to the kennel'.

What follows? A deep silence. The disciples are astonished. They wonder who Jesus is who could make even the whirlwind and the sea obey him. The answer is simple: he is the owner of the dog. Jesus is the master of the world, the master of nature. The one who has authority over everything. That is why he says to the lake: 'Do not bark at my children. Do not frighten my disciples. Sit quietly, for I have authority over you'.

## Is God not Needed?

Some years ago, my fellow priest who was teaching religion at a school could not cope with misbehaving pupils.



■ Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee by Rembrandt, 1633

He went to complain to the headmistress. The headmistress came to the class and asked the pupils: "What do you think is the most important subject in school?" They replied that it was maths because the headmistress taught maths. When the woman denied this, they began to list other subjects. Finally, the headmistress said that religion was the most important because there comes a point in life when no school knowledge can help, only the Lord God. Everyone knew that the woman had a sick child who fought for his life and was healed. For many people it is obvious that God is needed at such moments because no one else could help.

## Eye to Eye with Christ

Let us consider another story from Matthew 14:25-31. As Jesus is walking on the lake, Peter gets out of his boat and asks: "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water." Jesus says: "Come." And a strange thing happens. At a certain point Peter starts to sink. Why?

John Paul II commented on this story in this way: "Peter walked on the

waves of the lake, even though it was against the laws of gravity, because he was looking Jesus in the eye. When he doubted, when he lost personal contact with the Master, he began to sink and was rebuked: 'You have so little faith, why did you doubt?'

"It was not the wind that made Peter sink into the lake but the insufficiency of his faith. Peter's faith had lacked one essential element — complete abandonment to Christ, total trust in him at the moment of great trial; he lacked unreserved hope in him. Faith and hope, together with love, constitute the foundation of the Christian life, the cornerstone of which is Jesus Christ"

"From the example of Peter we learn how important in the spiritual life is the personal bond with Christ: it has to be constantly renewed and deepened. How? Above all by prayer. My dear friends, pray and learn to pray, read and meditate on the Word of God, strengthen the bond with Christ in the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist" (John Paul II to the youth, Poznań, Poland, 1997).

It is God who works wonders. It is God who allows people to be saved when there is no rescue from the human point of view. We need God against all appearances, against everything. We need God most when we have the hardest time.

## God Must be Sought

God must sometimes be sought. In Psalm 14 we read: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' Their deeds are corrupt and vile, not one of them does right. Yahweh looks down from heaven at the children of Adam. To see if a single one is wise, a single one seeks God" (Psalm 14:1-2).

In the original text, there is a bizarre use of the Hebrew verb, suggesting that God looks out of a window. It suggests God is not there, God is hidden behind the window, hidden away in heaven. So is the fool telling the truth when he says there is no God? In a sense, yes. They express their feelings, their impressions, not a true reality.

What is God doing? He looks out a window to see if there is at least one wise person in the world who does not say "There is God" but who seeks God when he is not there.

Even the least intelligent child in the world, when playing hide-and-seek and opening his eyes, never says: "There is no one, I am going home". They know perfectly well that if there is no one beside them, they have to look for them; they have to do something to find them.

A few years ago I met a jobless man. After listening to his story I asked, "Excuse me, but are you looking for a job?" "Are you making a fool of me? I just said there are no jobs. How can I look for something that isn't there?" I heard in reply. It sounds logical but only on the surface.

Only because we have a feeling God is not there, but that does not mean we can live without him.

On the contrary, in such a case we need to look for him more eagerly than before. Maybe we need to try new forms of prayers or even a new ministry group. We need to pray to the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds.

## Help God to Exist

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini once spoke about the importance of great people who draw all humanity to God. He gave an example of a Jewish

woman taken to a German concentration camp during World War II, who wrote in her diary: *At the moment when God seems to be absent; at the hours when God seems to have abandoned us; at the time when God seems not to be there, we must do everything to make God be. We must do everything to make him live. Just as he has helped our people to survive through the centuries, through the millennia, so we must help him to exist when it seems that he does not exist.*

If we have an impression that there is no God, we need to start seeking him. First, let us start with reconciliation as St Paul suggests: "In the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).

Only God can set us free, only God can save us in the end.

Pope John Paul II said, "Christ freed Peter from the fear which had seized him on the stormy lake. Christ enables us too to overcome the difficult moments in life, if with faith and hope we turn to him and ask his help. 'Take heart, it is I; have no fear' (Mt 14:27). Strong faith, from which is born limitless hope, a virtue so needed today, frees man from fear and gives him the spiritual strength to resist all of life's storms. Do not be afraid of Christ! Trust him completely! He alone 'has words of eternal life'. Christ never lets us down!" (John Paul II to the youth, Poznań, Poland, 1997).

\* \* \*

I must seek you, Lord God. I must be close to You, for if I am not close to You, how will I survive? I will not survive without You, because You are everything.

Fr Albert

# The Chariots of God (part 2)

**The Bible explicitly declares that God has indeed created angels who are pure spirits, also lesser known as extra-terrestrial intelligent beings. Angels are described in over half of the Bible's 66 books.**

**T**hey differ from human beings in that they are not constrained by the universe's laws of physics or the universe's space-time dimensions. They predominantly live in a realm distinct from the universe. However, God has granted them the power to enter into our realm in a physical or non-physical form.

## Dominions Teaching Self-mastery

The dominions are another choir of angels. Their task is to exercise God's dominion over creatures and also to direct the actions of the angels of the lower orders. Dionysius writes that the dominions participate in the divine reign that is free from contemptuous subjection and humiliation. They do not have any other motive than the true lordship of God and they form themselves and all the other creatures subjected to them in total submission to God.

St Bernard of Clairvaux says that it seems that the dominions so far surpass the lower choirs that the latter are the service of the dominions. On the dominions, then, depend the rule of the principalities, the protection of the powers, the action and power of the archangels, the care of the angels. In the dominions we are given to see the infinite majesty of the Lord, whose will is identified with power, and whose power extends to

the universe and to eternity. The dominions reign, but their reign is fulfilled in dependence upon the Most High whom they serve.

The dominions rule both the heavenly court and also the world. Henri-Marie Boudon (1624-1702; a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Roman Catholic French abbot and spiritual author) wrote that the dominions are to show us the will of God. We can say that they are the secretaries of state of Christ the King. They teach us how to be masters of ourselves; they teach us self-control, self-mastery, not giving in to temptations, not giving in to strong emotions, submission to the divine will that is revealed to us in our hearts and reasons, both being gifts from God.

## Powers Destroying Snares of Evil

The powers are the fifth choir of angels. They have the power to execute the ordinances of God and to fight against evil spirits. This choir is at the forefront of the battle against the powers of hell. If someone is experiencing any kind of hellish attack in their life, an attack of an evil spirit, a relapse of an addiction, then they should call upon the powers.

The name of the powers means to bring order. Dionysius says that the name of the powers means a kind of decree to accept divine orders, or divine actions that the higher ones do

in the lower ones to lift them up. This is the task of the powers: to lift men up so that they do not fall into hell but continue to strive towards heaven.

St Gregory the Great says that the powers have supreme power over evil spirits, the whole of hell must obey them. When God decides to rebuke evil the powers stand up with their mighty authority and say: "Enough, no more destruction, you will obey us".

St Bernard writes that the powers restrain the forces of darkness, they tame their urge to harm people. They only allow harm to be done when, with God's permission, it can be turned into benefit.

Here we come to an important theme: evil happens in the world by God's providence. What a strange idea that God allows evil to happen. St Augustine says that if God allows evil, it is only to prevent a greater evil from happening.

If a great evil or harm has happened to me and God has allowed it, what greater evil or harm could have happened to me? This is an angelic way of thinking.

Henri-Marie Boudon writes that when we see storm clouds gathering over the Church, over the state, plots against those who work for the glory of the Lord, extraordinary conspiracies formed to destroy the good that is intended for the diocese, the city or the country, then we should pray



to the powers because they can overthrow and destroy the mighty and wretched snares of hell. So when there is a moment of crisis in the community, in the Church, in the diocese, in the country, let us invoke the powers.

## Virtues Working Miracles

The virtues are another angelic choir often associated with grace and blessings from the heavens. They have control over natural elements and supervise the movements of the heavenly bodies, ensuring cosmic order. They influence seasons, stars, the moon, and even the sun.

The virtues work towards unity with God, never faltering due to weakness. Their strength is powerful, determined and unwavering and their fortitude unshaken in God's cause. They serve as instruments for God's miracles. We can call on the virtues in unforeseen accidents of sickness when we need heroic courage in the struggle against evil.

## Principalities Leading Countries

Another choir of angels is called the principalities. They take care over territories, communities and nations. Dionysius writes that the principalities signify the power to lead, guide and direct in the way God leads and directs. They attract the lower spirits to imitate and manifest the very way of divine guidance.

St Aloysius Gonzaga writes that the task of the principalities is to take care of God's orders being carried out by all creatures. They receive orders from God Himself and then pass them to the angels of lower choirs and help them to carry God's will out.

## Archangels Revealing Divine Plans

The choir of archangels have the role to take care of people, of nations and to transmit divine revelation to the Church hierarchy. In this way they bring order and knowledge to the world. Of all the archangels, we know only three by name: Michael, Raphael and Gabriel. We are called to turn to them in prayer, seeking their intercession before the throne of God.

Let us invoke St Gabriel, the messenger of God, for solace and guidance in times of sorrow. Let us seek the healing touch of St Raphael, the divine physician, when illness afflicts us or our loved ones. And let us call upon St Michael, the defender against evil, to safeguard us from the snares and temptations of the adversary.

## Guardian Angels Worshipping God and Protecting People

The last choir is called the guardian angels or simply the angels. St Matthew writes in the Gospel: "See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven" (Matt 18:10). This is a suggestion that the angels are responsible for worshipping God and watching over people. They appear frequently in the pages of the Scripture.

In the teaching of the Church, the angels have been mentioned by great Christian thinkers since the first centuries. St Cyprian calls them friends, St Basil says they are teachers, St Ambrose says they are helpers. St Jerome says: "Great is the dignity of the soul that everyone has a guardian



■ The Nine Choirs of Angels  
by Louis Licherie de Beurie, 1679

angel to protect it", and St Basil says: "Some of the angels are superior to the nations, while others are added to each of the faithful". St Augustine says that great is the care that the Lord God has for human beings, great is the love that He has shown for us by appointing angels to guard us.

Several saints were known for their devotion to angels: St Cecilia, St Francis and Blessed Dalmatius are often said to have talked to a guardian angel. There is an interesting story about St John Bosco. When he asked his guardian angel for help, the angel sent him a mysterious dog protecting the priest against his enemies. Let us note that the Book of Tobias also mentions a dog defending Tobias and Raphael during their journey.

I would like to thank the angels for being close to us:

*Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day, be at my side, to light and guard, rule and guide. Amen.*

Fr Matthew Szerszeń CSMA

# Angels Unveiled: Divine Encounters in the Bible (part 4)

**Angelic presence is woven into the very fabric of the Bible, where their appearances range from awe-inspiring to comforting, mysterious to life-altering.**



■ The Dream of St Joseph  
by Gerard Seghers, between  
circa 1626 and circa 1633

Join us on a celestial journey as we unveil the captivating encounters with angels that have left an indelible mark on the pages of the Holy Scriptures, bridging the mystical realm with our earthly existence.

## Angel Guiding Joseph (Matthew 1)

Joseph discovers that Mary, his betrothed, is pregnant. Troubled and not wanting to expose Mary to public shame, Joseph decides to quietly end their engagement. However, before he can carry out his plan, an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream.

The angel reassures Joseph, addressing him as “Joseph, son of David,” a significant reference to his lineage from King David. The angel explains to Joseph that Mary’s pregnancy is the result of the Holy Spirit’s work, and she will give birth to a son, whom they are to name Jesus, meaning “He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1: 21).

The angel further emphasises that this event fulfils the prophecy from the Book of Isaiah: “The virgin

is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’” (Matthew 1: 23).

Upon waking from his dream, Joseph fully accepts the angel’s message and takes Mary as his wife.

This angelic guidance to Joseph is significant because it not only confirms the divine nature of Jesus’ conception but also establishes Joseph as a crucial figure in the life of Jesus. Joseph’s obedience to the angel’s message demonstrates his faith and willingness to play a vital role in God’s plan of salvation.

## Angels Ministering to Jesus (Matthew 4 and Luke 22)

These events depict moments in the life of Jesus when angels provided comfort and support.

In Matthew 4, the story takes place after Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, Jesus faced various temptations from Satan. Following His steadfast resistance to these temptations,



the Devil left Him, and angels came and ministered to Him.

This passage shows the physical and spiritual challenges that Jesus endured during His time in the wilderness and underscores the role of angels in providing comfort and sustenance to Him after His ordeal.

In Luke 22, the scene occurs during the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. In the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus experienced deep anguish and distress as He prayed fervently to God, asking if it were possible for the cup of suffering to be taken from Him.

During this intense moment of prayer, Luke 22:43 states, "Then an angel appeared to him, coming from heaven to give him strength". The angel's presence brought comfort and fortitude to Jesus during this critical time of emotional turmoil.

These accounts of angels ministering to Jesus highlight the divine support and encouragement provided to Him throughout His earthly journey. They demonstrate that Jesus, despite His divine nature, experienced human emotions and struggles, and He received divine assistance from heavenly messengers when needed. We can and we should ask for heavenly assistance, too.

## Angel Rescuing Peter from Prison (Acts 12)

This dramatic and miraculous event portrays the divine intervention that secured the release of the Apostle Peter from prison.

The story begins with King Herod Agrippa I, who sought to persecute early Christians. He had James, the

brother of John, executed, and seeing that it pleased the religious leaders, he decided to arrest Peter as well. Peter was apprehended, bound with chains and imprisoned under heavy guard in Jerusalem.

As Peter lay imprisoned, the Christian community fervently prayed for his well-being. Their prayers were answered in a remarkable way. During the night before Peter's scheduled execution, an angel of the Lord appeared in his cell. The angel struck Peter on the side, woke him up and instructed him to get dressed and follow.

Peter followed the angel, and as they walked past the guards, the prison doors opened miraculously on their own. They passed through the first and second guard posts without being detected. Only when they were safely outside the prison did Peter realise that he had been rescued by divine intervention.

After his release, Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many members of the Christian community had gathered to pray for his release. Peter knocked on the door and a servant named Rhoda recognised his voice but was so shocked and overjoyed that she forgot to open the door.

Upon entering, Peter told them about his miraculous escape from prison and his testimony was met with astonishment and praise. He instructed them to inform James, the brother of Jesus, and the other disciples about his release.

The story illustrates the power of prayer and divine intervention in the face of persecution. It demonstrates the unwavering faith of the early Christian community and serves as a testimony to God's ability



■ St Peter Released from Prison  
by Benjamin West, 1800

to deliver His followers from seemingly insurmountable challenges. This event played a crucial role in strengthening the faith of the early Christians and spreading the message of Christianity.

These are just some of the instances of angelic appearances in the Bible. Angels serve as messengers and agents of God's will, often providing guidance, protection, and reassurance to individuals in significant moments of their lives. Their presence underscores the divine intervention and supernatural elements found throughout biblical narratives. Let us often pray to our guardian angels and to St Michael the Archangel. Who is like God.

Agata Pawłowska



# From a Smuggler to a Pilgrim of Mercy (part 2)

**In our pilgrimages, preparation is crucial, but it's also tempered by trust and wisdom. While we diligently plan and equip ourselves for the road ahead, there's an inherent element of surrender – to trust in the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit.**

**T**rust and wisdom, akin to two wings, propel us forward on our sacred journey, guiding us through the twists and turns of the road ahead.

On my journey from the Pacific to the Atlantic, spanning twelve states and five time zones, I pushed my water cart thirty kilometres each day. It was a sight that often drew surprise from the locals, accustomed to driving mere metres to their destinations in a country where sidewalks are a rarity. In America, convenience reigns supreme, with drive-in services for everything from drugstores to restaurants, creating a culture of car-centric living.

## Praying for Freedom

As I trudged along, the question echoed time and again: “Why are you walking?” Each time, I found myself explaining that I was praying – for America, for its people. This revelation piqued curiosity, leading to deeper inquiries about the specifics of my prayers. “What are you praying for, especially for Hollywood, Wall Street, Silicon Valley?” they would ask.

“My prayer is for freedom,” I’d reply, for only in freedom can true progress and innovation flourish. America, as the beacon of freedom and the embodiment of the American Dream, has freedom ingrained in its DNA. To speak of freedom to Americans is akin to discussing matters of faith with a priest – it’s intrinsic, inherent. It’s a nation built on overcoming boundaries, on continuous improvement, on embracing freedom at its core. This is the essence of America – the land of opportunity, the land of the free.

## Coexistence in Harmony

As I journeyed through America, I encountered a profound transformation in the people I met. Initially viewed with suspicion as an eccentric traveller or a thrill-seeking globetrotter, their perception shifted when they realized I was an ordinary man on a pilgrimage of prayer – a journey spanning a million steps across their country. Suddenly, they extended their trust, offering not just material assistance but a desire to join in my pilgrimage.



■ Roman Zięba, Pilgrim of Mercy

As I traversed the diverse landscapes of America – from Indian reservations to homeless shelters, from opulent cities to impoverished neighbourhoods – I found myself welcomed into homes of various faiths and backgrounds. Whether among the Amish, the Mormons or representatives of countless Christian denominations, I was embraced as a friend. Amidst the vastness of America, I encountered a microcosm of the world – linguistic and religious minorities coexisting in harmony.

## St Joseph and Sacraments

Yet, maintaining my spiritual life amidst the solitude of the journey posed challenges, particularly in accessing the Sacraments. Sundays became moments of anticipation as I

eagerly sought out Catholic churches using Google Maps, cherishing the opportunity to partake in the Holy Mass. However, in remote regions where settlements were sparse and churches few and far between, attending Mass was a rarity. Yet, even in absence, I found solace in prayer, uniting spiritually with my fellow believers as they partook in the Sacraments on my behalf.

Through the highs and lows of my pilgrimage, from moments of divine communion to stretches of spiritual desolation, one truth remained steadfast – the transformative power of prayer and the unbreakable bonds forged through shared faith and solidarity.

In the vast expanse of the American desert, under the canopy of a star-strewn sky, I found solace in the silent company of an icon – a gift from my community, bearing the image of Saint Joseph. Despite my previous reluctance to embrace this saint, I felt compelled to confide in him amidst the solitude of the desert. As I journeyed alongside Saint Joseph, delving into the mysteries of his silent presence, I found myself drawn closer to his enigmatic spirit.

### Chaplet of Mercy in N.Y.

Six months later, as I reached the bustling streets of New York City, the echoes of my pilgrimage reverberated within the shadows of the World Trade Center. Amidst the remnants of tragedy, where the new WTC One now stood, my companion Wojtek and I offered our final prayer. In November, 2018, the centennial anniversary of Poland's independence, we recited the Chaplet of Mercy – a testament to the enduring message of



■ One Trade Center, New York, USA

Divine Mercy as revealed to Faustina Kowalska. In that poignant moment, two Poles stood amidst the ruins, offering prayers for America and her people, while also seeking solace and renewal for ourselves.

In the years following my conversion, I embarked on increasingly solitary journeys within my community and the Church, under the blessings of our priest, bishop and chaplain. One of the earliest and most memorable expeditions took me from Jerusalem to Assisi, alongside two companions: Wojtek, a former gang boss who had spent twelve years in

detention, headed to Fatima, while Dominik journeyed from Moscow. Our paths converged in Assisi for a historic event organized by Pope Benedict XVI – a gathering of all world religions to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a similar event convened by John Paul II.

This pilgrimage marked my first venture into distant lands without secured accommodations, relying solely on providence and the kindness of strangers. Travelling from the Holy Land to the Balkans, I encountered closed borders due to ongoing conflicts, prompting a detour



through Haifa to Cyprus and then Turkey. Trekking roughly thirty kilometres each day with my backpack, I traversed ancient sites like Ephesus before reaching Bulgaria, where Orthodox Christianity welcomed me with profound emotion. Though I was warmly received in Muslim countries, I yearned for the solace of Church prayers – a poignant realization of the profound gift of communal worship.

## How it All Began

I recall traversing through Macedonia, Albania and across the Adriatic to Italy, journeying from Bari northward, passing by revered sanctuaries like Morfetto, Morletta and Manfredonia. Along my path, I knew I would encounter Monte Sant'Angelo, home to the renowned Sanctuary of Saint Michael the Archangel – a site of immense significance to me, my companions and our community.

The establishment of our community on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010, held profound importance, predating my pilgrimage to Assisi by a year. At that time, I was already engaged in the art of iconography, crafting sacred images. One of my earliest creations, an icon of Gabriel the Archangel, held special significance. Intending it as a token of gratitude for my mentor and spiritual guide, I stood before his door, icon in hand, unaware of the significance of the date. As Leszek welcomed me, his eyes fell upon the image of Gabriel, and he remarked, “Ah, Gabriel! Today is the Feast of the Three Archangels! He always brings a message. I wonder what He has in store for us today.” Intrigued by his words, I pondered the potential

significance of this divine coincidence, sensing that Gabriel's presence heralded something meaningful.

I recall vividly how the idea took shape during our stroll along the beach, the notion of embarking on a foot pilgrimage to unite the three cities – Fatima, Moscow and Assisi – with Jerusalem. It was during this walk that we identified the three individuals, each with their own past, who would undertake this extraordinary journey. Months later, we convened at the Shrine in Niepokalanow to deliberate the specifics of our route, including the necessary equipment and the costs of airfare. Despite the apparent challenges – long distances, minimal preparation and limited contacts – a profound sense of purpose propelled us forward, aligning the pieces of this pilgrimage into place.

## Helpers from Heaven

As a former project manager, I meticulously compiled a cost list, revealing a total of approximately \$8000. With no funds on hand, we faced the daunting task of securing sponsors. Thus, we turned to three revered figures – St Maximilian Kolbe, St John Paul II and St John the Baptist – as our first sponsors, seeking their divine assistance. Remarkably, our seemingly audacious endeavour captured the attention of various individuals, communities and institutions, who expressed a desire to support our cause. This outpouring of support affirmed the significance of our pilgrimage and reinforced our belief that our mission was indeed unfolding as intended.

Some time later, I found myself in Jerusalem, with only two hundred dollars to my name. Yet, I held firm

in my belief that whatever transpired was God's will, and thus, I encountered no obstacles. Day after day, I journeyed from one house of worship to another, traversing mosques, temples and beyond, until eventually finding myself in Italy.

I vividly recall the day before arriving in Gargano, just before reaching the Shrine of St Michael the Archangel. A familiar discomfort arose in my throat, a recurring ailment that plagued me every few years – tonsillitis. Regardless of antibiotics, this affliction demanded two weeks of bed rest, enveloping me in a fog of fever and lethargy.

Prior to my journey, my friends from the Polish community had learned of my itinerary, noting that on September 29<sup>th</sup>, coinciding with the Feast of the Three Archangels and the anniversary of our community's establishment, I would be visiting the Shrine of St Michael the Archangel. Leszek, our spiritual director, took charge, arranging transportation, including buses filled with individuals granted day passes from nearby penitentiaries, alongside our Polish pilgrims. They were to meet in one of the parishes where a visitation of the statue of St Michael took place. We were to synchronize our prayers to express our gratitude and ask St Michael to watch over us on our pilgrimage. All of them gathered together in Poland were waiting for my call.

## Piled-up Obstacles

The day before September 29<sup>th</sup> weakness, fever and mental fatigue besieged me. Waking in my tent, I realised I lacked even a single euro for aspirin. All I possessed was some leftover food in my backpack. As my





■ The Feast of St Michael the Archangel in Monte San'Angelo, Gargano, Italy / Photo: [www.kjb24.pl](http://www.kjb24.pl)

condition worsened, fever raging and swallowing becoming unbearable, I contemplated notifying Leszek of my inability to ascend the mountain. Yet, before I could send such a message, a text arrived from Leszek: "We're here, waiting. Let us know when you reach the mountain."

A shiver ran down my spine as I grasped the weight of their expectation. I couldn't abandon them. Despite the internal debate raging within me, the morning of September 29th found me clutching a Rosary, invoking St Michael for strength. The winding ascent up the steep mountain, spanning over ten arduous kilometres, forced me to halt every hundred meters or so. Wrapped in layers, hood drawn tight, leaning on my staff, I pressed forward.

As buses ferried crowds to and from the Shrine, I encountered one head-on, its massive glass window looming before me. In a desperate attempt to uplift my spirits, I blessed the buses with the sign of the Cross.

To my surprise, passengers caught sight of the hooded figure, Cross in hand, and made the sign of the Cross themselves. Each encounter fortified me, reminding me that I was not alone in my journey. It was as if, by some divine grace, I persevered despite my exhaustion, devoid of strength or energy.

Upon finally reaching the mountaintop, darkness had descended, marking the culmination of a day-long ascent. Above the town, fireworks illuminated the sky in celebration of the holy day. Despite my fever and weakened state, I couldn't shake the feeling that the archangel himself orchestrated this grand welcome. It felt as though the festivities were in my honour, affirming my miraculous arrival.

## Overcome with Awe

With the Mass impending, I found myself amidst a throng of pilgrims, unsure of my destination. Following

the crowd, I pressed forward, oblivious to the stares and prodding of curious children. As we approached the steps leading down to the subterranean church carved within the cave, the sheer magnitude of the gathering seemed insurmountable. Yet, miraculously, a path cleared before me, guiding me to the very heart of the temple.

Standing before the alabaster figure of St Michael triumphing over Satan, I was overcome with awe. It was as if an unseen force had guided me, for it certainly wasn't my own strength that brought me there. Though I couldn't comprehend the Italian Mass, the familiar cadence of the liturgy provided solace. Only as the moment of Communion approached did a concern arise: how could I receive the Lord in the Holy Communion if I couldn't even swallow?

Despite the physical limitations, I held faith that God would provide. As the Eucharist touched my lips, it

dissolved effortlessly, its sacred essence permeating my being. Though unable to consume it conventionally, the divine particles found their way into me, nourishing my spirit in ways beyond comprehension.

After the Mass, I exited the church, having earlier informed my companions of my presence, knowing that our prayers united us. Yet, as I stood there, the reality of my situation dawned upon me. I had made it to the mountain, attended Mass and felt a sense of happiness, but now faced the daunting question: where would I sleep? How would I navigate through this illness that left me barely standing? Desperation filled my thoughts as I silently pleaded for God's intervention.

## Undeniably Healthy

Before me, a neon sign flickered: Hotel Bianco. In that moment, its significance seemed inconsequential. All I desired was shelter. Inside, matters unfolded swiftly. Upon seeing my condition, the receptionist immediately assigned me a room. I stumbled inside, my hands trembling uncontrollably as I removed my backpack. The fever that had been brewing within me reached its peak, causing me to shiver violently.

Summoning every ounce of strength, I struggled to undress, my body wracked with cold. Hastily, I slipped into bed, discarding only my shoes. Layer upon layer, I draped myself with clothing, blankets and even a space blanket meant for emergencies. Yet, despite the layers, the chill persisted, penetrating to my very core.

Unable to eat, my body aching and feverish, I lay there, knowing only that I was safe. Grateful for

the shelter, I reached for the Bible from my bag. As I flipped through its pages, a picture fluttered out – a memento from Macedonia, adorned with a prayer for health. With trembling hands, I whispered the words of the prayer in Macedonian, seeking solace in the divine. And with that, exhaustion overtook me, and I drifted into a fitful sleep.

As I awoke, a strange sensation greeted me – the ability to breathe through my nose. It was a revelation, considering the night prior had been filled with mouth-breathing due to congestion. Tentatively, I tested my swollen lymph nodes, expecting pain, yet none came. Noon had arrived, judging by the sun's zenith, indicating a prolonged slumber. It was then that I noticed my surroundings were dampened by water, my sleeping bag soaked through. Hanging it to dry, I realized the cause – a night of intense sweating, likely induced by the layers of covers.

Remarkably, the illness that had plagued me just hours ago seemed to have dissipated. A lingering trace of discomfort remained, swiftly fading by midday. Weakness persisted, but I was undeniably healthy. The source of my healing remained a mystery, a confluence of prayers and divine intervention. Whether it was the collective prayers of my friends in Poland, the sanctity of the archangel's feast day, or the invocation of health from the Macedonian image of the Mother of God, I cannot say. The miracle defied explanation, leaving me in awe of its inexplicable power.

## Invoking Blessings

Embarking on the following day's journey to Assisi, I reunited with

my companions, united in the belief that divine guidance is unwavering. It was a testament to the transformative power of faith, illustrating that when one opens their heart to God's love, even the impossible becomes attainable. In the end, each miracle defies rationality, reminding us of the mysterious intersection between the supernatural and the material world. Yet, its tangible effects remain undeniable, paving the way for newfound strength and resilience.

Our experience of pilgrimage is rooted in a deep conviction that we are called to embark on a journey ordained by a higher purpose. Our prayers are not directed towards specific outcomes, such as societal changes or personal desires. Instead, as we traverse lands like Sweden or Ireland, our prayers are focused on invoking blessings upon the land and seeking mercy for both its inhabitants and ourselves. We understand that the ultimate plan for these lands and people lies solely in the hands of the Lord, who knows what is best for them.

As pilgrims of Divine Mercy, we pray with our feet, trusting that our physical journey serves as a conduit for spiritual grace to touch the world. This mission encapsulates the essence of our pilgrimage – to beseech God's mercy and grace upon the earth and its inhabitants.

The phrase *Who's Like God* evokes the profound truth of divinity present within humanity, embodied in the figure of a traveller. It serves as a reminder of the sacred union between the divine and the mortal, encapsulated in the act of pilgrimage.

Roman, Poland





Picture generated by AI

# St Michael at the Skid Row

**I would like to share a story that happened at the St Michael's retreat. It is a bizarre story, because it took place quietly, next to the mainstream events.**

I listened with interest to the retreat conferences, participated in the Holy Masses and services. And then we had a nice time with the other participants...

In the evening, I received a text message from Donna, my friend's girlfriend: "Tom is at the skid row, he is taking mephedrone. I don't know what to do."

I went out into the hall and called him immediately. His voice was conscious and he answered clearly.

"How are you?" I asked.

"Everything's fine."

"How are you spending your evening?"

"Merrily."

"Are you at home, Tom?" I kept asking.

"No."

"Where are you?"

There was long silence.

"Tom? Where are you?" I repeated.

"With my friends."

"What friends?"

"Well, with friends."

That kind of talk only made me more serious.

"Are you at the skid row?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"Are you drinking?"

"Yes."

"Are you taking drugs?"

"Yes."

"What are you taking?"

He started listing what drugs he was mixing at that moment.

"Are you able to get out of there?" I asked.

"I can, but I won't get out. It doesn't make sense, Iv. I'm already lost, I'll reach the bottom. They'll bring more stuff in soon. Bye."

He hung up and I froze. Tom and I had known each other for several years in the 12-step community. I had cheered him on in his recovery from various addictions, the worst of which was drug addiction. He had been clean for five years.

I knew what could happen if he overdosed. I didn't know what to do. I was over 180 miles from my hometown, where my friend was sniffing line after line.



I ran to the chapel. On the altar there was the Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for all-night adoration, and next to it was a large statue of St Michael the Archangel. I bowed to the Lord Jesus and then approached the statue. I was shaken and angry at the same time.

"You must help him, you understand!" I stabbed St Michael in the chest with my finger. "You can't leave him there or he'll collapse to death! I don't know how to do it, but you must go there immediately and pull him out, even if only by the head!"

I sat down in front of Jesus and asked Him in a few words for mercy for Tom.

After leaving the chapel, the thought crossed my mind: "Get an address out of him." I called Tom again.

"What do you want?" his voice was quite aggressive.

"Tom, where exactly are you? What part of town?" I tried to keep calm.

"What do you care!"

"Come on, tell me. Over there on the block, behind the garages?"

"No, on ..." He said the name of the street.

"And Tom, and what address, because it's a long street..."

"What are you going to do? Are you going to come here from your retreats?"

"Is it a house, a block of flats, Tom?" I didn't give in to questions.

"A block of flats."

"Oh, great. Do you know the number of the block?"

"No... it's near the shop" He started babbling.

"Tom, what shop is it?"

"With... bi... bikes."

I had it! There was only one bike shop in the street. I hung up and immediately rang Rich, our friend from the AA. My voice breaking, I told him about Tom.

"Don't worry. You've given us the directions; I'll get the others together and we'll look for him."

"Just let me know what's going on."

It was late at night. I was sitting on my heels, alternating between praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and looking at my phone. I was afraid they wouldn't find him because he had only given an approximate address. Or if they did, they would find the dealers and there would be a fight and violence... When it comes to drugs and money, they have neither mercy nor scruples.

But in my heart I heard the words: "Be calm. I'll take care of it."

Finally, Rich called:

"We have him. We found him and pulled him out of the flat by his head. He's home now. Well done, Iv."

With joy and relief, I ran to the chapel to thank St Michael for his intervention. I was sure that without the Archangel's help we would not have been able to stop Tom from self-destruction.

Completely exhausted, I reached my room. I was dreaming of a hot shower and sleep. And here's a surprise... the phone vibrated again.

"What's up, Tom?"

"I'm home, you know?"

"I know, and I'm glad you're safe."

"The action was like in a movie."

"I can imagine."

"You did this, did you? You sent the AA guys at the skid row?"

"Yes. I couldn't bear the thought that my friend might die."

"You saved me..."

"I don't have powers like that. It was God who saved you, man. By the hands of the AA guys. He cares a lot about you."

"Iv... I don't want to be left alone now."

"What's going on, Tom?"

"My body is going to call for another dose. I know I'm too weak and I'm getting carried away to go out and get another drug. I've locked myself in the bathroom. Will you stay with me?"

"Sure."

"Turn on the webcam. I want to see your face and smile."

For the first time I saw what happens to a person, to his body, when the drugs stop working. I accompanied Tom until my phone disconnected. Then I entrusted him to God in prayer and went to sleep. It was a really crazy, dramatic night.

In the morning, I immediately looked at my phone. A text message from Tom: "I'm alive. I didn't go out. Thanks for everything. I'm going to bed."

"Thank you, God. Thank you, St Michael." I thought.

Tom slept off the night, I went to get a strong coffee. Another day of retreat awaited me. The conferences on St Michael were not just theory. After that night, his power and intercession proved to be real and the truest in the world. St Michael inspired us, Tom's friends, to act and pray, and saved his life.

Who is like God!

Ivonne

# 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)**



■ St Michael and the Dragon  
by Antonio del Pollaiuolo

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

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