

## Tuesday Reflection 290920

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, Archangels and immediately we run into a problem. My understanding of 'Saint' is of a person who led an exemplary life on Earth and now rests in the Lord. Now, although angels are often personified - and graphically depicted in art, as in the impressive sculpture of Michael overcoming Satan on the exterior of Coventry Cathedral - or maybe appear to assume human form for a particular mission - they are in fact not corporeal beings, but spiritual beings performing certain divine functions. Thus, in the case of today's trio, Michael is presented in the Apocalypse as the leader of the heavenly host, Gabriel appears in the book of Daniel and most famously in St Luke's Gospel as God's messenger, and Raphael occurs in the Book of Tobit as the angel who heals Tobit of his blindness, and the name means "Healer".

Angels are interwoven within our human culture. Regardless of religion or belief system, stories of angels are a part of our heritage, of the fabric that makes up human history. Most of the major religions feature angels as part of their belief, and indeed nowadays there appear to be many who profess a belief in angels but are otherwise atheists or, at best, agnostics, which seems to me to be a case of putting the cart before the horse!

In our Catholic tradition we only feature the three archangels whose feast we celebrate today, but as the saying goes "other archangels are also available" from different traditions representing different functions of divine power.

Thus there is Archangel Ariel, the patron saint of animals and the environment; her name means 'lion or lioness of God'. Her role is to protect the earth, its natural resources, ecosystems and all wild life and is always available with support and guidance for any activities that involve environmentalism and protecting, healing, rejuvenating, and/or maintaining our environment.

Archangel Azrael's name means 'whom God helps'. However, he is often referred to as the 'Angel of Death'. Azrael meets souls and helps them in the transition of death, in addition to helping newly crossed over souls adjust. He also helps loved ones who are still on the earth plane in dealing with their grief and processing the loss. This archangel assists in all types of transitions and endings, not just those involving loss and death.

Insofar as archangels perform specific divine functions, they can also act as role models for us; thus from Michael we can learn to be strong in the defence of our faith, Gabriel can help us proclaim God's Word, Raphael can support us in our healing ministry, Ariel can point to our responsibility for the care of the environment, and Azrael can support us and help us to support others at moments of change and transition.

It is perhaps in their acting as role models that Archangels can have the label 'Saints' attached to them.

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