

# Catholic

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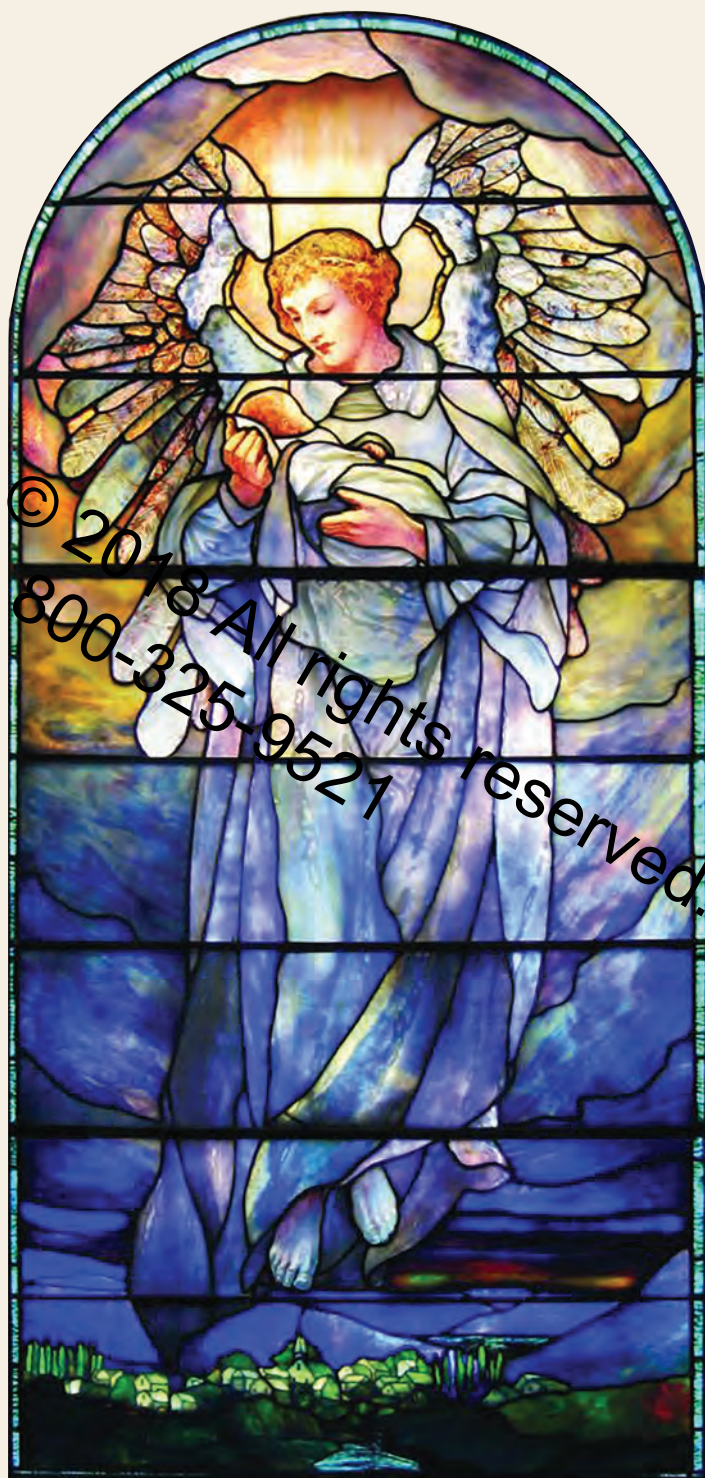
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## Angels Servants of God Guardians of the Faithful

MICHAEL EISENBATH

For something mysterious, a great deal of buzz surrounds the subject of angels. Consider their frequent sightings in pop culture. They show up in movies, from Clarence in *It's a Wonderful Life* to Angels in the *Outfield*. They have been the subject of dozens of hit songs, such as country hits “Angels in Waiting” and “Wild Angels.” And angels have appeared on TV—the good, in shows like *Touched by an Angel* and *Highway to Heaven*, and the bad, in *Dominion*.



TIFFANY WINDOW © 1900

If you would like to find genuine devotion to the heavenly hosts, though, look no further than Scriptures and Church tradition. Indeed, it appears the angels were created before almost anything else.

*Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation...  
while...all the angels shouted for joy?*

—Job 38:4, 7 (New International Version)

How embedded are angels in Church tradition? The Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels on October 2. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* dedicates more than twenty paragraphs to discussing teaching on such creatures. “The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls ‘angels’ is a truth of faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition” (CCC 328).

We have long been taught that everyone has a guardian angel. Such angels are our spiritual friends, assigned to us by God. “From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. ‘Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.’ Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God” (CCC 336, quoting St. Basil).



*Schutzengel* (Guardian Angel) by Bernhard Plockhorst depicts a guardian angel watching over two children (Wikipedia).

Just as we can ask the saints to pray for us, we also can ask our guardian angels for protection and guidance. They serve an active purpose for each person. For instance, they can send good thoughts into our minds and motivate us to do what is good. They take our prayers and good works to God, and they can show the will of God to people. There is biblical evidence that angels can protect us from danger. Consider that an angel set Peter free from prison (Acts 12:7). And in the Book of Daniel, angels helped protect Daniel in the lions’ den and kept three young men from being harmed in a fiery furnace.

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More commonly, our guardian angels can save us when we might be headed toward sin. “When tempted, invoke your Angel,” St. John Bosco said. “He is more eager to help you than you are to be helped! Ignore the devil and do not be afraid of him: He trembles and flees at the sight of your Guardian Angel.”

While angels often are given human form in art and onscreen, real angels differ from people, as noted in the *Catechism* (329–30):

*Saint Augustine says, “Angel’ is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is ‘spirit’; if you seek the name of their office, it is ‘angel’ from what they are, ‘spirit’ from what they do, ‘angel.’ With their whole being, the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they “always behold the face of my Father who is in Heaven” they are the “mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word.” As purely spiritual creatures angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness.*

Human beings cannot become angels. Although we often hear that a loved one who died has become our personal guardian angel who is watching over us from heaven, it’s simply not true.

Our hope during our earthly life is to become holy, a saint. That doesn’t mean a person has to be canonized by the Vatican to enter heaven; those heavenly residents are saints. Heaven is filled with countless anonymous saints, with a lowercase “s.” In the *Catechism’s* glossary, a saint is defined as “the holy one who leads a life in union with God through the grace of Christ and receives the reward of eternal life.”

Like human beings, angels are immortal (they can live forever) but not eternal (they had a beginning, created by God). Angels do not have natural physical bodies. They are pure spirit, with an intellect and will, and were created by