

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



Archangels

Friday in the First Week of Lent

Reading: Tobit 12: 6-15

Then (the Archangel) Raphael called the two of them privately and said to them, ‘Bless God and acknowledge him in the presence of all the living for the good things he has done for you. Bless and sing praise to his name. With fitting honour declare to all people the deeds of God. Do not be slow to acknowledge him. It is good to conceal the secret of a king, but to acknowledge and reveal the works of God, and with fitting honour to acknowledge him. Do good, and evil will not overtake you. Prayer with fasting is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, but those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies.

I will now declare the whole truth to you and will conceal nothing from you. Already I have declared it to you when I said, “It is good to conceal the secret of a king, but to reveal with due honour the works of God.” So now, when you and Sarah prayed, it was I who brought and read the record of your prayer before the glory of the Lord, and likewise whenever you buried the dead. And that time when you did not hesitate to get up and leave your dinner to go and bury the dead, I was sent to you to test you. And at the same time God sent me to heal you and Sarah your daughter-in-law. I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord.’

Commentary

Many people think of the Archangels as the highest-ranking angels in heaven. We have already seen that this is not so, and they are in fact in the lowest sphere. This is because they are heralds of good news to humanity. We probably know these angels best of all, especially three of them whose names are given to us in the Scriptures: Michael, often shown slaying a dragon (as in this window), which is the devil he defeated in the heavenly battle (Rev 12); Gabriel, who is often seen with a lily representing his place as the Archangel of the Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1); and Raphael, who is depicted in travel clothes and carrying a fish from his role as Tobias's guide and protector (Book of Tobit).

In the Book of Tobit, as we have read above, Raphael identifies himself as one of seven ministering angels. Pseudo Dionysius includes, besides Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, the names Uriel, Camael, Jophiel and Zadkiel. Apart from Uriel, they are not usually recognised as they are don't feature in the canonical scriptures.

Archangels serve as Divine ambassadors, announcing the great and most glorious messages to humans. As St Gregory the Great wrote in the 6th Century, 'Those who make minor announcements are called 'angels', those who make important ones are called 'archangels.'

Each of the names of the Archangels have meanings which refer to the kind of tasks with which they are involved.

‘Michael’ means ‘Who is like God?’ or ‘Who is equal to God’; ‘Gabriel’ means ‘God is my strength; and ‘Raphael’ means ‘God heals.’

Meditation

St Michael

Psalm 17:8: "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings".

Thank God for times when you have felt His protection and pray for those who need it at the moment.

St Gabriel

Isaiah 52:7 “How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

Thank God for all those who have brought you good news, kind words and encouragement. Pray for those who need to hear these things at the moment and for the strength to say them when the opportunity arises

St Raphael

Psalm 103: 2-3 “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.’

Thank God for the gift of His forgiveness and for the healing you have received at various times in your life. Pray for those who are living with the pain of guilt, shame and remorse and all who are sick and needy.

Prayer

Everlasting God,
you have ordained and constituted in a wonderful order
the ministries of angels and mortals:
Mercifully grant that,
as your holy angels always serve and worship you in heaven,
so by your appointment
they may help and defend us here on earth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.