

Tridentine Community News

April 22, 2007

The Choirs of Angels

“Et ideo cum Ángelis et Archángelis, cum Thronis et Dominatióibus, cumque omni militía caeléstis exercitus, hymnum glóriæ tuæ cánimus, sine fine dicétes:”

In English: “And therefore with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominations, and with all the hosts of the heavenly army, we sing the hymn of Thy glory, ever more saying:”

How many times have we heard these words chanted in the Preface of the Holy Mass? You might even have the melody playing in your head right now. But do we really understand to whom they refer? The Prefaces change throughout the liturgical year, but these or similar words appear in all of them. However, because many of these words normally have unrelated meanings, it is easy to ignore or forget that the liturgy is speaking entirely of Angels in this context.

There are nine Choirs of Angels. A “Choir” in this sense means a ranking. While not an official part of Catholic doctrine, the notion of Choirs of Angels is promoted throughout the Church’s liturgy, not only in the Prefaces, but also for example in the *Exsúltet* sung at the Easter Vigil, which contains the words, “Sing, Choirs of Angels”. There are scriptural references for them in the Old and New Testaments. Tradition has identified them as follows:

Seraphim: The highest rank, Seraphim see God directly and love Him with the most intensity. They also guard God’s throne. Lucifer, or Satan, was once one of the Seraphim, giving you some idea of his closeness to God before his fall.

Cherubim: This Choir sees God directly and represents wisdom and knowledge of God’s plan for creation.

Thrones: This rank also sees and adores God directly and contemplates His divine justice.

Dominations: (also known as **Dominions**): This rank oversees the lower ranks, as their name implies.

Virtues: This rank acts upon directions from the Dominations and rule over nature and the created universe.

Powers: This Choir defends against evil forces opposed to God’s plan.

Principalities: As their name suggests, this Choir defends nations, cities, and other forms of earthly states.

Archangels: Messengers of God’s will to mankind

Angels: These assigned to guard each one of us. They also convey our prayers to God, as words in the Canon of the Mass state.

The Prefaces of the Mass make specific mention of our joining our voices with those of the Choirs of Angels to give God praise. Military terminology is even employed (“the heavenly army”) to represent the common duty of the Church Triumphant in heaven, united with the Angels, and also united with the Church Militant on Earth, to give God unending worship.

We must not forget the presence of the Holy Angels. While not much discussed, they perform critical roles in God’s plan for the universe and for us. They can be of significant assistance to us, as you may have learned if you have received inexplicable help during times of trouble in your life.



Many of us know Fr. Wolfgang Seitz and Fr. Titus Kieninger as celebrants of the Tridentine Mass. Their order, the Canons Regular of the Holy Cross, is part of the movement, *Opus Sanctórum Angelórum*, the “Work of the Holy Angels,” and is chartered to promote devotion to the Holy Angels. The Canons run retreats and conferences throughout North America, many of which are focused on the Angels.

Liturgical Note: Gospel Rubrics

Two little-known facts are worthy of mention concerning the reading of the Holy Gospel in the Tridentine order of Mass:

When the Gospel is read in Latin at a sung Mass, the congregation and servers are not to say, “*Laus Tibi, Christe*” at the conclusion. That response is only to be made at the end of the Gospel in Low Masses. However, “*Deo grátias*” is to be said at the end of the Epistle,

even at sung Masses.

If the Gospel is read in the vernacular at the pulpit, the priest and congregation are not to make the threefold sign of the cross at the introduction, nor should they say “Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ” at the end. Likewise, the congregation should not say, “Thanks be to God” at the end of the Epistle. These vernacular readings are not part of the Mass, and the restriction of these gestures and responses to the actual Mass helps to distinguish what is inside vs. what is outside of the Mass.

It is not clear why these rubrics exist, however it is clear that they do exist. Of course, we should be understanding of those who do not practice them, as they are admittedly opposite to the instincts that most of us have developed from the Novus Ordo. But as with every aspect of the Tridentine Mass, we should strive to obey Holy Mother Church’s directives so that we can offer the most perfect worship possible.