

Tridentine Community News

August 23, 2026 – Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

The Nine Choirs of Angels According to Sacred Scripture and Traditional Catholic Theology Part 1 of 2

By James Murphy

Poor catechesis has led to many misconceptions about angels; this article will help clarify some of these misconceptions. The Catholic Church teaches that the angels are pure spiritual creatures, created by Almighty God, possessing intellect and will, who glorify God and serve His Providence. Their creation is taught by Sacred Scripture and professed by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the First Vatican Council (1869–1870). It is important to note that angels are pure spirit while humans are body and spirit (soul).

Sacred Scripture names Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim (cf. Is. 6:1–7; Col. 1:16; Eph. 1:21; Jude 9). Following especially Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Gregory the Great, and St. Thomas Aquinas, Catholic tradition commonly arranges these nine choirs into three celestial hierarchies.

I. THE FIRST HIERARCHY — CONTEMPLATION OF GOD

1. SERAPHIM — Burning Love

The highest choir. Isaiah saw the Seraphim surrounding God's throne and crying: "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts" (Is. 6:3). Their name signifies burning ardor. St. Thomas, following Dionysius, associates them particularly with the highest intensity of charity and love of God.

2. CHERUBIM — Divine Knowledge

The Cherubim signify the fulness and excellence of knowledge and contemplation of divine things. They guarded Eden (Gen. 3:24), overshadowed the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:18–22), and appear in the visions of Ezekiel. They signify the splendor of created intelligence illuminated by Divine Wisdom.

3. THRONES — Divine Judgment

Named by St. Paul in Colossians 1:16. Their name signifies stability, receptivity to God's will, and participation in divine judgment and government. They are called Thrones because, analogically, God's judgments rest upon them as a king exercises judgment from his throne.

II. THE SECOND HIERARCHY — DIVINE GOVERNMENT

4. DOMINATIONS — Command

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Named in Colossians 1:16 and Ephesians 1:21. Their name signifies lordship and government. According to traditional theology, they direct inferior angelic spirits in carrying out the commands of Divine Providence.

5. VIRTUES — Heavenly Strength

Named in Ephesians 1:21 according to traditional Catholic terminology. Virtues signifies strength or power. They are associated with the powerful execution of God's commands and, traditionally, with extraordinary divine operations. Their power remains entirely dependent upon God.



6. POWERS — Order and Restraint

The Powers (*Potestates*) are associated with preserving divine order and restraining hostile spiritual powers. St. Thomas connects their name with removing obstacles opposed to the execution of Divine Providence. Their office reminds us that Satan and the demons remain creatures absolutely subject to God's sovereignty.

III. THE THIRD HIERARCHY — HUMAN AFFAIRS

7. PRINCIPALITIES — Peoples and Nations

Traditionally associated with God's providential government of nations, peoples, communities, and kingdoms. Daniel speaks mysteriously of angelic "princes" connected with nations and calls St. Michael a prince of God's people (Dan. 10).

8. ARCHANGELS — Great Divine Missions

Archangels are entrusted with particularly important missions. St. Michael defends God's people and battles the dragon (Jude 9; Apoc. 12:7). St. Gabriel announces the Incarnation to Our Lady (Luke 1:26–38). St. Raphael accompanies Tobias and identifies himself as one of the seven who stand before God (Tob. 12:15).

9. ANGELS — Particular Guardianship

The lowest choir, but still sublime spiritual creatures. They are particularly associated with God's providential care of individuals. Our Lord speaks of the angels of the little ones who "always see the face of my Father" (Matt. 18:10). Scripture also declares: "He hath given his angels charge over thee" (Ps. 90:11). Hence the ancient Catholic doctrine and devotion concerning our Guardian Angels.

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Tue. 08/25 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Benedict/Holy Name of Mary, Windsor* (St. Louis IX, King & Confessor)