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Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, Archangels

Date: Monday, September 29, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 138:1–5 | **Response:** Psalm 138:1
Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 103:21
Gospel Reading: John 1:47–51
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

A few years ago I was visiting a friend's family home. His youngest son had been sneakily watching the TV series *Lucifer*. He was fascinated with angels and started asking me all sorts of questions: Do angels really exist? Do they all have wings? Do they fight? Do they watch over us? And then he asked the hardest of all: Why does God not forgive Lucifer?

I confess that some of his questions I couldn't answer on the spot. Since then I've thought it important to find out more—because popular culture often paints angels in ways that are entertaining but incomplete. The Church gives us something deeper and truer: a vision of God's messengers, His servants, His warriors, and His healers.

And as for that hardest question: it is not that God refuses mercy, for His mercy is infinite. The problem is that Lucifer—and the angels who followed him—are pure spirits. Unlike us, they do not live in time. They made their choice with a clarity and finality we can hardly imagine. We humans sin out of weakness or confusion, but time gives us space to repent and turn back. The fallen angels chose once, with full knowledge, and their "no" is irrevocable. Their refusal was absolute. It shows us the seriousness of freedom—and the greatness of God's mercy toward us, who still have the chance to change, to be forgiven, to be healed.

The Catechism tells us the existence of angels is a truth of faith. They are pure spiritual creatures, created to serve God and to guide us. As Hebrews says: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are

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to inherit salvation?" (Heb 1:14). The word "angel" itself comes from the Greek *angelos*, meaning messenger. They are woven into salvation history, and their presence continues in our lives today.

The readings for this feast pull back the veil between heaven and earth. In Daniel's vision the Ancient One takes His fiery throne, and "one like a son of man" is brought before Him and given everlasting dominion. This Son of Man is Christ Himself—the one the angels adore, the one they serve, the one who reigns forever.

In the alternative reading from Revelation, we see Michael and his angels casting down the dragon, that ancient serpent the devil. It reminds us that the battle between good and evil is real—but it is already decided. Satan is fallen, Christ is victorious, and Michael shows us that courage and fidelity always triumph.

Our responsorial psalm, Psalm 138, is a hymn of thanksgiving: "I give you thanks, O Lord, with all my heart; before the angels I sing your praise." The psalmist places his human voice alongside the voices of heaven. That is what we do at every Mass. When the *Sanctus* rises, heaven is brought close to earth. As Isaiah tells us, the seraphim cry: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." Their hymn becomes ours. For a moment the distance between heaven's throne and our church is erased. The veil is lifted, and heaven bends down to earth.

And in the Gospel Jesus promises Nathanael: "You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." He recalls Jacob's dream at Bethel, where a ladder reached to heaven with angels moving upon it. But here there is no ladder. The ladder is a person. Jesus Himself is the bridge between heaven and earth.

Tradition gives names to three great angels, whom we honour today.

Michael—"Who is like God?"—is the warrior. In Revelation he casts down the dragon. His very name is a cry of humility, not competition. When corruption or violence seem invincible, Michael calls us to stand firm with courage rooted in God.

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Gabriel—"God is my strength"—is the messenger. Luke tells us: "The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a virgin in Nazareth" (Lk 1:26). Through Mary's yes, the Word became flesh. Gabriel reminds us that true strength is not domination but faithfulness. In a time when words are cheap and truth is traded for favour, Gabriel teaches us to speak clearly, call others by name, and invite them into God's story.

Raphael—"God heals"—is the companion. In the Book of Tobit he reveals himself: "I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord" (Tob 12:15). He walks with Tobias, heals the blind, and delivers from danger. Raphael reminds us that healing often begins with quiet presence and faithful friendship. In a world scarred by mistrust, Raphael calls us to restore not just health but wholeness.

These three archangels show us the mission of all angels: to be messengers of God's mercy. And they invite us to imitate them—to fight for dignity like Michael, to speak truth in love like Gabriel, to walk with the wounded like Raphael.

The Church has always kept the angels close. In the older form of the Mass we ended with a prayer to St Michael, asking him to defend us in battle. After Vatican II that prayer was deliberately moved into private devotion so the liturgy could remain centered on the Eucharistic mystery. This has been a source of tension for some who cherished the prayer. Yet the reform was not meant to diminish the archangels' power, but to invite us to carry their intercession outside the Mass, into daily life—just as the angels themselves ascend and descend on the ladder of Christ. So let us keep the prayer to Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael alive in our hearts, even as we celebrate the Eucharist according to the Spirit's gift to the Church.

Tradition also speaks of nine choirs of angels—Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones; Dominions, Virtues, Powers; Principalities, Archangels, Angels. Their names vary depending on whether you follow Pseudo-Dionysius or Gregory the Great, but always the image is harmony, not chaos. The word "choir" comes from the Greek *choros*, meaning dance. At the highest level Seraphim burn with love, Cherubim shine with wisdom, Thrones bear God's justice. Then come

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Dominions who govern, Virtues who channel miracles, Powers who restrain evil. Finally Principalities guide nations, Archangels bring great messages, and Angels themselves guard us as companions.

Some Fathers of the Church even saw in these choirs a reflection of our three holy orders — deacon, priest, bishop — though this is a spiritual analogy, not official teaching. And yet the connection is clear: angels serve invisibly, while we serve tangibly, in flesh and blood. Christ did not become an angel; He became man. For it is not the angels but humanity that is made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26). Angels reflect God's splendour, but we alone bear His image in our bodies and souls. That is why Christ took on human nature to redeem us (Heb 2:16). Our human bodies are not obstacles but instruments of holiness.

Why then are angels shown with wings? Not because they are birds, but because wings symbolize swiftness and their heavenly origin. Why do they sing? Because song is the language of praise, the overflow of joy. Our most solemn liturgy is sung because song carries us beyond ordinary speech. If the Trinity itself is described with the image of *perichoresis*, a divine dance of love, then the choirs of angels are that dance set to song. And we in Africa know how dance and song lift worship—when we sing and move before the Lord, we join heaven's liturgy.

But not all spirits serve God. "Lucifer"—"light-bearer"—is the name tradition gave to the fallen angel described in Isaiah as the morning star (Is 14:12), later identified with Satan. His fall was through pride, a refusal to serve. Evil is never God's creation but the misuse of freedom. Demons sow division. They tempt us into comparison, which leads to pride or despair. They aim at desolation: the shrinking of faith, hope, and love. Ignatius of Loyola teaches us to watch carefully: any increase of faith, hope, and love is a sign of consolation; any decrease is a sign of desolation. Angels, by contrast, strengthen, enlighten, and encourage.

And just as we celebrate Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael today, the Church keeps close our Guardian Angels, whom we shall honour on 2 October. Jesus Himself says of the little ones: "Their angels always behold the face of my Father in heaven" (Mt 18:10). Each of us is accompanied. Revelation 8 even shows an angel offering the prayers of the saints like incense before God's throne. You can and should pray to your guardian angel—not as a fantasy friend but as a real companion God has entrusted to you.

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All of this leads us back to the Eucharist. Here heaven and earth meet. Here the angels surround the altar. Here the Son of Man, whom Daniel saw, is present under the humble signs of bread and wine. Here we join the angelic hymn of thanksgiving, and then carry the courage, clarity, and compassion of the archangels into the world.

So I leave you with three questions for prayer this morning:

- Where in my life do I need courage to stand firm for what is right, like Michael?
- What word of truth has God entrusted to me, and how can I speak it with Gabriel's clarity?
- Who around me is hurting, and how can I walk with them toward healing, like Raphael?

Brothers and sisters, may the courage of Michael, the clarity of Gabriel, the compassion of Raphael, and the quiet presence of our Guardian Angels guide us always—until the day when we too see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Let us pray:

Holy Michael, defend us in our struggles against evil.
Holy Gabriel, strengthen us with God's word of truth.
Holy Raphael, walk with us and heal our wounds.
Holy Guardian Angels, guide and guard us each day.
And may Christ, the Son of Man, be our ladder to heaven.

Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.

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