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A word from Fr. Brad.

Angels...

As we approach the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels, my thoughts turn to the guiding presence of angels in our lives.

As children, you and I may have been told we have guardian angels to watch over us, especially when we are anxious about the night. As adults, tutored by materialist science, we should let go of such creatures of our imagination. Or should we?

“Angel” can refer to a physical spiritual being or a holy presence of the divine. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures affirm that angels are real. They appear in times of desperation or spiritual transition. Western art and music are filled with allusions to angels. Remember the music of Christmas. In the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, we find this affirmation: “from infancy to death human life is surrounded by their (guardian angels’) watchful care and intercession. Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.”

Peter Stanford, in his excellent book, *Angels: A History*, shares

“In a 2016 poll of two thousand people, one in ten Britons (have said) they have experienced the presence of an angel, while one in three, like my mother, remain convinced that they have a guardian angel.”

“While belief in God is on the wane, belief in angels is flying high. One survey reports that 21 percent of Britons who never participate as worshippers in religious services, as well as 17 percent who describe themselves as atheists, say they believe in angels.”

According to a Gallup poll, in 2004, 78% of Americans and 56% of Canadians believe in angels.

The gospel narratives reveal that the life of Jesus was filled with angelic visitations. From the annunciation to Mary, a visit to Joseph in a dream, a glorious appearance to the shepherds at Jesus’ birth, and warnings to Mary and Joseph to escape the murderous intentions of King Herod, the angels are holy messengers and protectors.

After his baptism, Jesus is propelled by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, facing the Satan's temptations. After Jesus has resisted Satan, angels come to "look after him."

In the Garden of Gethsemane, facing torture and crucifixion, Jesus prays to the Father for strength. The Angels come to spiritually fortify him for what is to come. On the day of Jesus' resurrection, the gospels present various scenarios: angels appear after the empty tomb, angels come as messengers to announce what has happened, or there is no angel but only a young man in a white robe.

Sister Joan Chittister OSB, Benedictine nun, has written about angels as symbols of God's presence and support in our lives. Angels give us the sense that God is with us, providing comfort and support. We are not alone. Sister Joan helps us see angels in the kindness of strangers and the unexpected help we receive in difficult times. She encourages people to look for the divine in everyday interactions. Angels can help us to navigate our spiritual journeys, giving us insight and encouragement when we need it most.

Years ago, my son, Erik, was in the ICU at Children's Hospital of Orange County. A friend contacted Rabbi Harold Kushner; author of the book *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*. His own son had died ten years earlier. Rabbi Kushner called me. We talked about what it feels like being a religious professional, and how God can seem far away when we are in crisis ourselves and our loved ones are suffering. Then, Rabbi Kushner quoted from his recent book:

"One of my favorite aphorisms comes from a nineteenth-century Hasidic rabbi who once said, 'Human beings are God's language. When we call out to God in our distress, God answers us by sending us people.'"

When we wonder where God is in the desert times of our lives, look around you. Notice the people who are there with you. People are God's language (God's angels).

Faithfully,
Fr. Brad