

St Michael and All Angels 2014

Picture this: You are reading a book in a quiet place. You are engrossed in the climatic scene when suddenly there is a noise or some unexpected movement. Then it happens: a shiver flushes over your body. Whatever the circumstances, we all have had shivers.

When we feel things like love, fear, sadness, or surprise, the hypothalamus at the base of the brain sends a signal to our bodies that produces adrenaline in our blood. The signal may trigger the arrector pili muscles to contract, and then we have goosebumps caused by emotion. The sudden adrenaline rush may also cause sweaty palms, tears, increased blood pressure, or shivers.

I have had the shivers many times for all sorts of reasons. Others have told me about experiences that gave them the shivers. Sometimes they occurred while worshipping, praying or other religious associated thoughts and activities. When someone tells me of a particularly profound, personal moment of a deep and moving spiritual nature, I get the shivers!

Today we commemorate St. Michael and All Angels. According to virtually every holy book in existence, supernatural beings, good and evil, have played an active role in the affairs of humankind. In the Bible, angels have appeared as shining beings, or at other times have

appeared as if human. They have acted as guides to travelers and opened prison doors. Heavenly angels have restrained calamities and prolonged the tranquillity of multitudes. Human eyes have looked upon them; human ears have listened to their appeals; human lips have echoed their suggestions and repeated their counsels; human hands have met them with willingness to serve.

The angel that appeared at Christ's tomb (according to Matthew 28:3,4) "looked like lightning and his robes white as snow." This Icon of the Trinity, mounted on the pulpit wall, depicts the the three angelic messengers who visited Abraham with promises of blessing.

Angels are sent on missions of mercy to the children of God. Elijah suffering from weariness and hunger in the desert was sustained an angel, Elisha was aided by chariots and horses of fire when he was shut in by his foes. Angels came to Daniel, while seeking divine wisdom in the court of a heathen king, or abandoned to become the lions' prey; to Peter, doomed to death in Herod's dungeon, to Paul and his companions in the night of the tempest on the sea; to open the mind of Cornelius to receive the gospel; to dispatch Peter, with the message of salvation to the Gentile stranger — thus holy angels have in ages past ministered to God's people.

Angels are invisible spirits that God created before He created the physical universe. They are pure spirits, like

pure energy, having no body whatsoever. They do not have wings, despite the fact that artists usually portray them that way to indicate their swiftness and ability to appear out of nowhere. They are often portrayed as youths or children to convey their innocence and purity.

Being by nature closer to God, angels receive a greater power of understanding, infused ideas, clarity of thought in perceiving the Will of God and the destiny of humans. Angels are knowledgeable of all things by virtue of being pure spirit. They are able to grasp totally the meaning of anything and move with dazzling light in the spiritual realm.

Angels can be good or bad. The fallen angels with the archangel, Lucifer, as their leader are often called devils or demons. One must be cautious always when encountering these spiritual beings. Bad angels have been known to disguise themselves as good.

Over the years there have been filmmakers who exploit our curiosity over these mostly unseen creatures. Thanks to modern cinematography and computer generated animation, they vividly tell tales of struggles between good and evil. Sometimes they are so graphic that they give us those shivers I mentioned.

We have to remember that they are fictional representations. They are entertainment and sometimes

are educationally helpful but more often deceptive. Most of us like an engaging story. We also have a curious obsession with the macabre. Who doesn't like a good scare when it's all pretend? The proof of this is the rise in Halloween parties, decorations, etc., etc.

In our daily lives, we probably never think much about angels. We go about our lives, the chances and changes, the ups and down. The work of angels is most likely done in secret, purposely hidden in the good will of the created order and the Providence of God.

Yet from time to time we become aware of their work or presence, especially in time of great need. In hindsight we remember moments and events when extraordinary unseen help guided and shielded us.

When I was in a near fatal auto accident, I remember calling out, "Jesus, help me" as my car spun out of control on black ice. In an instant as it rotated, it was struck by a delivery truck but thankfully on the passenger side. If anyone had been in that seat they would not have survived. In shock, I felt a strange calm that my prayer had been answered by a messenger of God.

As people of faith, we are encouraged to give to God the glory whenever we have been saved and delivered. We are told how precious we are to God, our creator, and how loved by God the Son, our brother, and watched over by

God the Holy Spirit. The agents who connect us to the Divine realm are often those angels created to do God's bidding in joyful service. They are the guardians our faith tells us are ever ready to manifest God's concern and longing for us to find peace and eternal life. Amen.