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## The Role of the Angels in the Sacraments and the Liturgy

### I. Premises

- a. In the Ascension the Word leads humanity, which he has united to himself into the House of his Father. The angels wondered at this.
- b. Now this reality has to put forth its effects until the Second Coming. It does this by
  - i. Sacraments
  - ii. Liturgy
  - iii. Scripture
- c. Through the angels God ministers these effects
  - i. *Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?* (Heb 1:14)
  - ii. We also read: “In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty....” (Roman Canon)
  - iii. It seems further that each local Church, (e.g. a diocese or eparchy) has an angel: *To the angel of the Church in Ephesus write.... To the angel of the Church in Smyrna write... etc* (Rev 2 – 3)
    1. Regarding the angels of the churches Origin goes so far as to say that there are two bishops in each local church, one visible, the other invisible and that they are busied with the same task.

### II. Baptism

- a. Preparation for Baptism
  - i. Just as the apostles are sent visibly to all nations, so too the angels are sent invisibly to prepare the many for the Gospel and gather the faithful into the universal Church. But Scripture also indicates that local churches have an angel.
    1. *And He will send out the angels to gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.* (Mk 13:27)
  - ii. Eusebius remarks that the mission of the angels to draw souls to baptism is also a battle against idolatry, against demons who hold souls captive.
  - iii. The Sacramentary of Gelasius has a prayer for catechumens and begs that the Lord vouchsafe to send his holy Angel to preserve His servants and to lead them to the grace of baptism.



- iv. Origen records a prayer: Come angel, receive him who has been converted from his former error and the doctrines of demons...Receive him as a careful physician; warm and heal him...Receive him and give him the baptism of second birth.
- b. Role of angels in Baptism itself
  - i. There is a kind of hint at the role of Angels in baptism in a passage from John: “*Sir,*” *the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am on my way, someone else goes in before me.”* (John 5:7)
  - ii. Tertullian speaks of the role of angels in baptism: “Cleansed in the water by the action of an angel, we are prepared for the Holy Spirit. Thus, an angel is set in charge of baptism.”
  - iii. Origen says, At the time that the Sacrament of Faith was administered to you, there were present heavenly powers, the ministration of the angels.
  - iv. Ambrose says, “After Baptism you began to advance. The angels watched, they saw you draw near and they suddenly beheld the splendor of your state...Thus they asked, *Who is this coming up from the desert shining white?* (Song of Songs 8:5) Thus the angels are lost in admiration. Do you want to know how great their admiration is? Listen to the Apostle Peter as he tells us that we have been given what the angels longed to look upon.” (see 1 Peter 1:12)

### III. The Role of the Angels in Every Liturgy

- a. Origen reasons, *If the angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear Him and shall deliver them,* (Psalm 34:7) then it is probable that when many are assembled legitimately for the glory of Christ that the angel of each encamps round each of them that fear God...Thus when the saints are gathered, there is a twofold Church, that of men and of angels.
- b. Regarding the homily Origen warns that the angels are listening to it and judging it.
- c. Though our eyes are dimmed due to sin and we cannot see the multitude of angels, nevertheless Scripture attests to their presence. For example:
  - 1. *When the young servant of Elisha the man of God got up and went out early in the morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. So he asked Elisha, “Oh, my master, what are we to do?” “Do not be afraid,” Elisha answered, “for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.* (2 Kings 6:15-17)



2. *The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary.*  
(Psalm 68:17)

#### IV. The Role of the Angels in the Liturgy of the Eucharist

- a. The Mass is actually a participation in the heavenly liturgy. Thus, there are myriads of angels and many saints round about in every Eucharistic liturgy.
  - i. *You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to myriads of angels in joyful assembly, to the congregation of the firstborn, enrolled in heaven. You have come to God the judge of all men, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* (Heb 12:22-24)
- b. St John Chrysostom says that the angels surround the priest and the whole sanctuary is filled with angels honoring Christ, present in the Eucharist. He adds that we, though lowly, have been deemed worthy to join the powers of heaven in the worship of the Lord.
- c. The preface too attests to the many angels present: “And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy”
  - i. St John Chrysostom says of the preface, “Reflect upon who it is you are near and with whom you are about to invoke God – the Cherubim! Thing of the Choirs you are about to enter. Let no one have any thought of earth (sursum corda). Let him lose himself of every earthly thing and transport himself whole and entire into heaven. Let him abide there beside the very throne of glory hovering with the Seraphim and singing the most holy song of the God of glory and majesty.”
  - ii. Chrysostom further notes the Gloria is the song of the lower angels and even the Catechumens can sing it. But the Sanctus is the song of the Seraphim in the very sanctuary of the Trinity. It is reserved for the baptized.
  - iii. Ἅγιος ὁ Θεός, Ἅγιος ἰσχυρός, Ἅγιος ἀθάνατος, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς.
  - iv. *Agios o Theos, Agios ischyros, Agios athanatos, eleison imas.*
  - v. Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us.
- d. Theodore of Mopsuestia sees in the deacons who arrange the sacrifice on the altar we can see an image of the invisible powers of the angels also ministering.

#### V. Afterword

- a. Chrysostom says, “For if the very air is filled with angels, how much more the Church! Hear the apostles teaching this when he bids women to cover their heads with a veil because of the presence of the angels. ....The angels exult, the



Archangels rejoice, the Cherubim and Seraphim join us in the celebration of the feast... What room is there for sadness?”