



The Angels and Death

- I. Scriptural and Liturgical roots
 - a. *The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.* (Luke 16:22)
 - b. The Offertory of the Requiem in the EF Missal implores that “Michael, the standard-bearer, may lead us forward into the Holy Light, promised of old to Abraham and his seed.”
 - i. This prayer is rooted in Jude 1:9 which speaks of the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses.
 - c. The ancient antiphon from the Requiem Mass says, “May choirs of angels escort you into paradise...May the Holy Angels welcome you...”
- II. The Insights of the Fathers
 - a. Tertullian says, When by force of death the soul is snatched from the weight of the flesh that closed it in, it trembles with excitement to see the face of an angel, the summoner of souls, realizing that its eternal abode has been prepared.
 - b. St Ephrem imagines the confusion of a man when he sees the heavenly powers just after death: “When the armies of the Lord show themselves and when the divine commanders bid him to leave the body behind, he shakes and trembles at the unaccustomed sight of these figures.”
 - c. Origen says that “Immediately after the soul leaves the body...there follows a separation of the just from the wicked. Then they are led to the place they are deserving of.”
 - d. Chrysostom says, “If we need a guide in passing from one [earthly] city to another, how much more so will the soul need someone to point the way when she breaks the bonds of the flesh and passes on to the future life.”
 - e. St Ephrem sees the angels “taking up the soul...and carrying it through the upper air.”
 - f. St Gregory the Great says, “The hymns of the angels fill the soul with so divine a joy, that it does not notice the sufferings of death. And during its voyage toward heaven, the angels scatter the demons who try to bar the soul’s advance.” He also notes that the angels of paradise are asked by the lower angels to permit the soul to enter there.
 - g. Saint Aloysius Gonzaga (1568–1591) taught that at the moment when the soul leaves the body, it is accompanied and consoled by its guardian angel so that the soul can present itself confidently before the Judgment Seat of God. If the soul is



sent to purgatory, it will be visited frequently by its guardian, who will comfort and console it, bringing the prayers that have been offered for it, and assuring the soul of its future liberation.

- h. There is also the “river of fire” mentioned by St. Paul:
 - i. *Each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If what he has built survives, he will receive a reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as if through the flames.* (1 Cor 3:13-15)
 - ii. The author of the ancient “Apocalypse of Paul” speaks of a man lifted up in to a mystical vision and sees a river of fire. He asks what it might be and an angel says to him that if anyone is impure but repentant he is led forward, first to adore God, and then by command of the Lord he is handed over to Michael the Archangel [and others] who “baptize” him in the river of fire and then leads him to the City of God.
 - iii. Purifications having been completed, the Guardian angels lead the soul into heaven.
 - iv. The angels in heaven reserve special attention for virgins and martyrs.
 1. Eusebius says that virgins will not walk toward the King, they will be carried by the angels.
 2. Of the martyrs, Origen says the angels look at them with wonder and greet them as conquerors. And they sing, “Who is this coming from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength?” (Isaiah 63:1)
 3. St John Chrysostom says, “The Martyrs go up to heaven surrounded and preceded by the Angels as an escort. When they arrive in heaven all the holy powers from on high run forward and stand before them, trying to see their wounds. They receive them with joy and embrace them. Then they form an immense procession to lead them to the King of heaven...taking part in mystical songs...leading them into the Holy of Holies.”
- i. So,
 - i. The angels help the soul escape the sufferings of death.
 - ii. The guardian angel accompanies the soul and assures it of a peaceful journey
 - iii. He defends it against the demons who want to stop it.
 - iv. He goes along the way of the river of fire and there souls are purified.
 - v. He bids the angels at the gates to open.
 - vi. The Angels of the gates welcome the soul.
 - vii. Special honor and joy is reserved for virgins and martyrs.



- III. What of our Guardian Angel after we die? There is no doctrine, but a general consensus that:
- a. If the soul enters communion with God, it joins its angel in praising the One and Triune God for all eternity.
 - b. If the soul enters Purgatory, the angel neither needs nor can participate in the purification of its ward's soul. That is given to other angels to perform. The guardian angel can and does intercede for us before God and seek help among the people on earth so as to bring prayers to the souls in its care, in order that it may thus leave purgatory.
 - c. As for those souls who go to Hell, the angel can only praise God's divine justice and holiness.
 - d. It is not clear if Guardian Angels take up other souls or duties after we die.