



Angel of God

By Emily Stimpson Chapman

What Scripture and the Catholic Church teach us about angels—and alumni stories about their angelic encounters.

Defeat for the Israelites seemed certain. Under the cover of darkness, Syrian soldiers had surrounded the city of Dothan, ready to strike at first light, trusting in their greater numbers to win the day.

When the servant of the prophet Eli'sha awoke and saw the enemy their people faced, he ran to his master. "What shall we do?" he cried (2 Kings 6:15).

Eli'sha, however, was unfazed.

"Fear not," he replied, "for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16).

The servant was confused. He saw the Syrian soldiers ringing the city and knew just how many troops the Israelites had. The Syrians clearly had the advantage.

But then, the Lord opened the servant's eyes and revealed to him what Eli'sha already saw: legions of "horses and chariots of fire" filling the mountain and sky (2 Kings 6:17). The angelic armies of the Lord of hosts stood ready to do battle by Israel's side.

Those armies still stand ready to do battle by our side today.

"We are all in a spiritual battle, and it can look like we're outnumbered, but that's a lie from hell," says Dr. Mark Miravalle, St. John Paul II Professor of Mariology at Franciscan University. "There is an entire civilization of beings far more numerous, intelligent, and higher in the created order than we are waiting to help us."

Those beings are the angels of God. And just as they populate the pages of sacred Scripture, with the patriarchs, prophets, and kings of Israel encountering angels at almost every turn, they also populate our world, filling the heavens and the earth.

What do we really know about these heavenly beings? Who are they? What do they do? And how can we strengthen our relationship with them?

The Angelic Nature

According to Miravalle, most essential truths about angels come straight from Scripture. Ancient writers and saints such as Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure then built on those scriptural testimonies in their own writings.

Based on Scripture, the common Catholic consensus is that at the beginning of time, before the creation of humanity, all angelic creatures underwent some kind of moral testing, much like what Adam and Eve would later undergo. While Scripture is mostly silent on what that testing entailed, the Fathers of the Church believed that it was the revelation that God the Son would become man and, as the God-Man, rule over the angels, with Mary, his mother, as their queen.

Some angels rejoiced at that revelation. Others, led by Lucifer, did not.

“The answer was ‘*Non serviam*,’ ‘I will not serve,’” Miravalle explains. “Lucifer would not serve a God with a human nature, and he would not serve a human as his queen. So, as Revelation 12 tells us, a third of the stars are swept from the sky. That is, a third of the angels were lost to heaven through their disobedience.”

That angelic fall was once for all. Unlike humans, who receive opportunity after opportunity to repent, angels don’t get do-overs.

“Angels don’t ponder because they don’t have a brain to ponder with,” says Miravalle. “They have perfect intelligence. They comprehend what they are going to comprehend in a moment and don’t change their mind.”

Moreover, whether they are at home in heaven or hell, all angels have always been angels. Contrary to popular representations in the media (think *It’s a Wonderful Life*), angels are not human beings rewarded with special intercessory powers after death. They are spiritual creatures. They also don’t have bodies, and they don’t get bodies, although occasionally they manifest physically in visions or take on a temporary bodily form.

When that happens, however, Miravalle stresses, “The body is not part of the angel’s nature; it’s part of his mission.”

Angelic Work

Angels may lack bodies, but that doesn’t mean they have no relation to matter. Those that passed their great test, before the creation of man, were entrusted by God with the governance of the universe in all its particulars.

“Patristic and medieval commentators saw all the movements of the planets and stars in the heavens as part of a kind of cosmic liturgy,” says Dr. Scott Hahn, who holds the Father Michael Scanlan, TOR, Chair of Biblical Theology and the New Evangelization at Franciscan. “Drawing on the Psalms, they saw the universe as deeply personal, with every detail in

creation reflecting the glory of God, and, somehow, related to and coordinated by these pure spirits, who are more intelligent and powerful than we can possibly imagine, more than all the scholars and armies of the world.”

According to Hahn, angels have been involved in human affairs since Adam and Eve took their first breath. They are in every period of salvation history and every layer of scriptural tradition. The coming of Jesus Christ, however, further empowered them to intervene in human affairs.

“Jesus is Jacob’s ladder,” says Hahn. “By taking on humanity, then dying and rising, he multiplies exponentially what angels are capable of doing, especially in and through the sacraments.”

As for what angels do, just as in the Church on earth, where God delegates different tasks to different members of the body, the angels also have their delegated tasks.

Drawing on the writings of St. Paul, the sixth-century theologian Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite breaks down those tasks, explaining that there are nine choirs of angels, with each choir taking on a specific job. Each choir, in turn, is grouped into one of three hierarchies, with each hierarchy taking on similar types of jobs.

The first hierarchy, made up of the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones, do the work of praise and adoration. These angels are before God in heaven always, giving glory to him through angelic worship.

The second hierarchy consists of the Dominions, Virtues, and Powers—angelic choirs whose primary work is governing the universe: directing the movements of the planets, overseeing the changing of the seasons, and battling demonic powers in the cosmos.

The third angelic hierarchy, made of up Principalities, Archangels, and Angels—govern human events. Principalities direct principedoms, or large countries or continents. Archangels guide nations. And angels—or guardian angels—lead individual human beings to heaven.

Angelic Protection

On a day-to-day basis, it’s the ninth choir of angels, guardian angels, that is most intimately involved in individual human affairs.

“Every one of us has a guardian angel who awaited our conception and arrival into this world,” says Miravalle. “God gave us this personal angel who knows us better than any human knows us and who seeks a friendship with us so he can lead us to our heavenly home.”

These guardian angels are exclusively consecrated to one human being. One angel guides one man or woman, forever. Which means for every human who has ever or will ever exist,

a guardian angel also exists. Their number is beyond measure. So, too, is their eagerness to carry out their divine commission.

“By grace, beings that are altogether different from us become our siblings,” says Hahn. “They are more different than we are than we are from rocks, but they wait eagerly for when they are called by God to go to earth and be consecrated to a human person, to guard and guide them.

“That is their way of sharing in the divine condescension of the Logos,” he continues. “They get to participate in the Incarnation by stooping down low and serving us in order to get us to heaven. You can just imagine an angel crying out when they are finally entrusted with their person: ‘It is my turn! I get to go down! I get to be like Jesus!’”

For the angel, though, there is a catch. To fully intervene on our behalf, our angel needs our permission. They respect our freedom and don’t force help upon us. This is why daily prayer to our guardian angel is so important.

“It doesn’t have to be complicated,” Miravalle explains. “You can use the traditional guardian angel prayer or write your own. But you need to communicate with him daily, inviting him into your life, not just in times of danger or difficulty, but also in times of discernment and

temptation, so he can give the wisdom and guidance he’s meant to give.”

Importantly, it’s not just your guardian angel to whom you can pray. You also can call upon the guardian angels of your children, spouse, friends, and loved ones, asking them to exercise special care over their charge. And if you have any enemies or strained relationships, asking your guardian angel to have a little chat with their guardian angel can make all the difference.

“Our guardian angels want to build bridges between us,” says Hahn. “When pride gets in the way, the angels are often the only ones who can help.”

How do you thank your angel for all his hard work?

Miravalle recommends going to eucharistic adoration.

“Then your angel can watch over you and praise God at the same time, which is most conducive to his nature.”

But when you can’t get to adoration? Like during a global pandemic?

Then, Hahn says, the best way to thank your guardian angel is to ask him to do what he loves doing: helping you.

He explains, “In your angel, you have a best friend who is wealthier than Bill Gates, more powerful than the president, and more intelligent than Einstein. Yet, so many of us have virtually no awareness of the guardian angels who have been entrusted to us. Especially as we go through dark times, when we feel outnumbered and overwhelmed, we need to remember the angels who’ve been waiting for ages for the opportunity to help us get home to God.”





Your Guardian Angels

Guardian angels are real. Whether we see them or not, each and every one of us is accompanied through life by an angel, whose great work is to get us home to heaven. Most of the time, that work is hidden. Sometimes, however, for reasons we can't fathom, God gives us a glimpse of our heavenly friend's care.

Recently, we asked our alumni if they'd ever received such a glimpse. Here are a few of our favorite responses.

When I was 13 years old, my sister and her friend, who was a pilot, came to visit our home in rural northwest Ohio. When it was time for them to return to Cleveland, we decided it would be fun to take turns riding in the airplane. It was so exhilarating, riding in that small, two-seater airplane. It was a physical reminder of how small I was in comparison to the greatness of God.

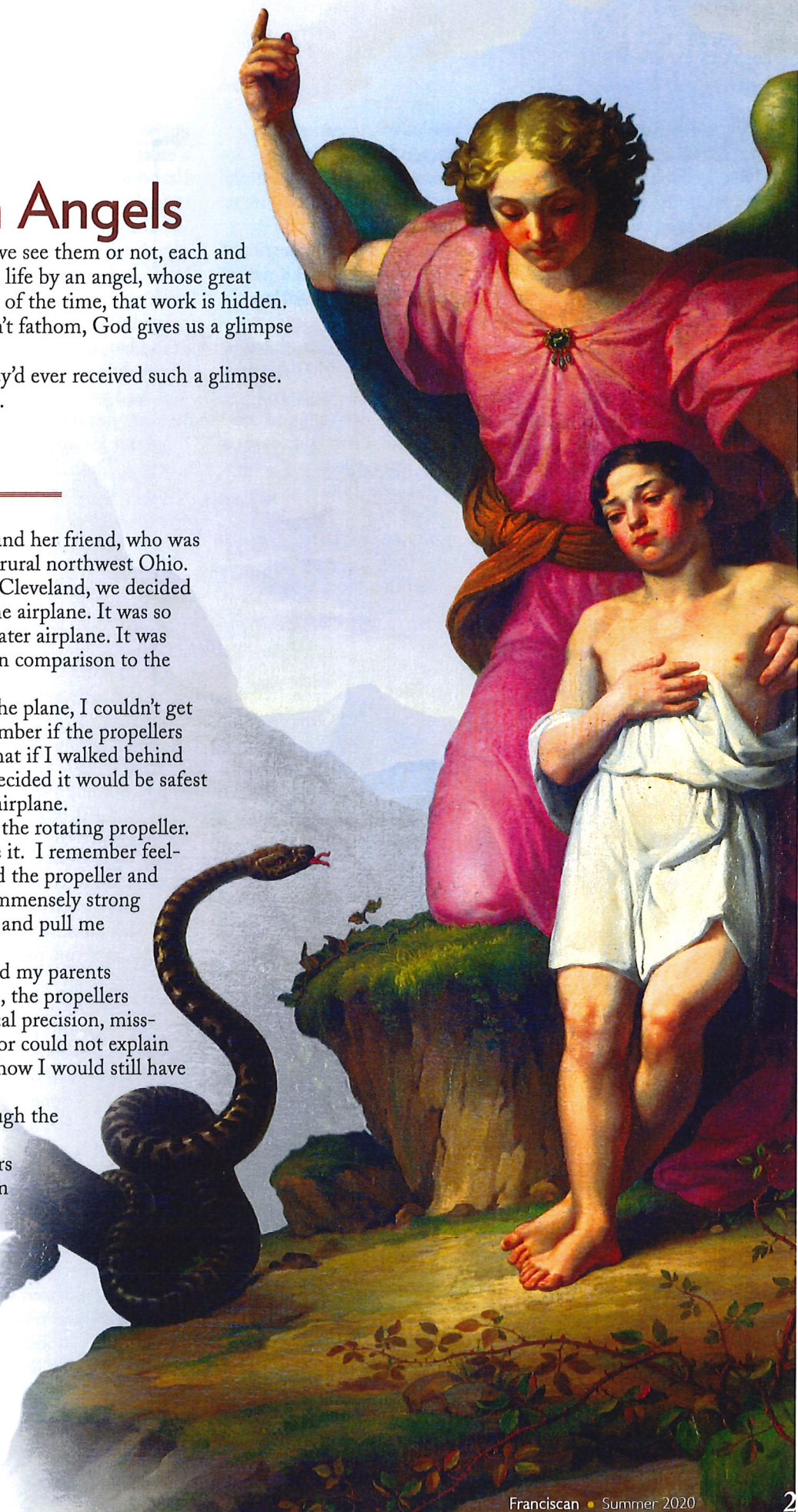
When it was time for me to get off the plane, I couldn't get the pilot's attention, and I couldn't remember if the propellers were on the front or the sides. I feared that if I walked behind the airplane, I would get run over, so I decided it would be safest to walk very far around the front of the airplane.

Unfortunately, I walked directly into the rotating propeller. It was spinning so fast that I couldn't see it. I remember feeling a very strong force pulling me toward the propeller and certain death. Simultaneously, I felt an immensely strong person wrap their arms around my torso and pull me back with an indescribable force.

Later, at the hospital, the surgeon told my parents that I should have died instantly. Instead, the propellers cut through my arm with almost a surgical precision, missing any major arteries or veins. The doctor could not explain how I was alive, how I had my arm, nor how I would still have full function of my arm.

Through the grace of God, and through the incredible strength and protection of my guardian angel, I am alive today. The scars from the four lacerations on my right arm are a constant reminder of God's love and of guardian angels that walk among us . . . protecting us, guiding us, and always lighting the path toward heaven.

—Jenna Petros '09



As a parish priest, I hear many stories of appearances or messages from angels or the Blessed Virgin Mother. Rarely do any happen to me. Yet, I know an angel wanted me to bring the anointing of the sick to a 99-year-old woman, who was in her final moments of life.

The woman, Laura, had been a faithful wife and devoted mother for many decades. Since her childhood she had prayed to St. Joseph, every day, asking for a peaceful death and to die while receiving the sacraments.

I had regularly visited her in the nursing home in the small town where I am assigned. So, I knew the day of her death was drawing close, and the family was keeping me posted.

Early one morning, at about 4:00 a.m. I received a call on my cell phone. In my stupor, I accidentally turned it off and laid down again. I thought, "If it's important, the person will call again." Then, a few moments later, I heard the doorbell ring. It seemed crazy to hear the doorbell at that hour, so I went to the door and opened it. But no one was there. I went back to bed. No sooner did I lay down, than the doorbell rang again. This time, I not only opened the door,

but went outside, stood on the porch, and looked around. Not a creature—bodily creature—was stirring. So, closing the door, I sat down inside my house and waited for it to ring again. It rang. I jumped up to catch the prankster . . . but again, nobody.

Only at that point, did I think to look at the number on my phone. Why I didn't do this before, I don't know. I called back, and it was one of Laura's daughters. I asked, "Is she still with us?" She was. So, I zipped over to the nursing home and prayed with Laura, her youngest daughter, and one of her granddaughters. I then gave the anointing and commendation of the dying. As I did the final blessing, she breathed her last and died peacefully, with her daughter and granddaughter holding her hands.

After leaving the hospital, I went home and collapsed on my bed. Then, I went and said my regularly scheduled morning Mass. Returning to my rectory, I reached for the door. Before I could touch it, the doorbell rang. I froze in my steps and thought, "Someone is saying thanks." There was no wiring problem, no stuck button. It was never a problem before or after.

—Father Eric Weldon '89

One night, while I was a novice, I was standing at the sink getting ready to brush my teeth, when I suddenly had the desire to blow my nose. The interesting thing was, I hardly ever blew my nose, except when I was sick. I turned to throw the tissue away, when all of a sudden, the heat lamp above me completely exploded. If I had been brushing my teeth and had not turned to throw the tissue away, the heat lamp would have exploded directly over me.

I looked down at my bare feet and noticed glass all around me, but not one piece touched me. That seemed impossible! I was convinced it must have been my guardian angel shielding and protecting me. Immediately, I had a flashback to when I was 16 years old.

In high school, I had the habit of studying in the library during my lunch hour with my friend Rebekah. Every day for two years, I'd gone to the library to study. Except for one day: April 20, 1999. That day, right before lunch hour, I had an overwhelming urge to leave school. I decided I would go home, eat a quick lunch, and study for the test I had the next hour. I remember thinking, "And no one is going to talk me out of this!"

On my way out, I ran into Rebekah in front of the library and talked her into leaving with me. A few minutes later, as we were driving away from school, I looked in my rearview mirror and noticed hundreds of my schoolmates running out. We soon found out there had been a shooting at our high school: Columbine High School. Two of my schoolmates opened fire that day, killing 12 students and 1 teacher, and wounding 24 others before taking their own lives. Most of the shootings happened in the library.



After that, I wondered constantly about why I had that urge to leave school. Then, one day, I overheard my friend's mom sharing my story with her friend. Her friend responded, "God must have a plan for her life!" That is when I realized God existed and that he had a plan for me.

A few years later, when I was at Franciscan, going through RCIA with Professor Barbara Morgan and Father Dominic Scotto, TOR, I often wondered how God spoke to me to leave school that day. Was it God directly speaking to me? Was it through the power of the Holy Spirit? Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit? By my guardian angel? Maybe all of the above?

After that heat lamp shattered, I felt like I got my answer. The next day, I went to the chapel for morning prayer. I wasn't even thinking about the experience I had with the shattered glass, when all of a sudden, I was aware that my guardian angel was with me. I felt I was overshadowed and embraced by my angel, with my guardian angel's wings around me. I felt so loved, protected, and safe. Then, later that morning, after personal prayer, breakfast, and exercise, I went to my work area to begin work. I opened up the drawer and discovered a small pad of paper. On every page was a picture of a young girl on her bed, overshadowed by her guardian angel.

To this day, through the experience of the shattered glass and all that followed, I believe God was showing me he has always been with me, protecting me, and has truly given me a guardian angel "to light, to guard, to rule, to guide." That angel has always been with me, protecting me, even when I didn't know God. He was with me that day at Columbine. He was with me in the convent. And he will always be with me!

—Sister Mary Gianna Thornby, DLJC '05

One morning, as I rushed to get ready for a day on the beach with friends, my mom walked into my room. She had overheard me on the phone talking about riding jet skis and wanted me to know that I was not to ride one under any circumstance. I answered back, "Mom, don't worry; I won't. I'll just enjoy the beach."

I jumped into my friend Mimi's car and shared what my mom had said, knowing full well I was not going to give up riding jet skis. Mimi suggested we pray during the long ride out to the Keys, and ironically, prayed these exact words, "Please God, don't let Nannette break her leg."

After a long day of riding the forbidden jet skis, my boyfriend asked if I wanted to accompany him for one last ride. I honestly thought about it for a moment, remembering my mother's words, but figured there couldn't be any harm in one more ride. I jumped on the back of the jet ski, and we drove off. Within minutes, the wave from a passing boat, coupled with our excessive speed, caused him to lose control. We were tossed into the water.

When I came to the surface, I felt excruciating pain in my leg and realized I had a severe ankle injury. Bleeding terribly, I began to lose consciousness. My boyfriend helped me onto the jet ski, and he raced back to the sand bar for help.

When our friends saw my ankle, they immediately used a T-shirt as a tourniquet and screamed for help. Out of nowhere, a man with wavy blonde hair and piercing blue eyes scooped me up in his arms and demanded that one of the boats take us to shore to meet the ambulance. He asked me questions, trying to keep me awake, and applied pressure on the wound. My friends asked him his name, and he simply replied, "Ron."

We arrived at the shore, and the paramedics rushed me to the hospital. Mimi turned to thank Ron, but as fast as he had come to the rescue, he was gone. Literally disappeared into thin air.

Days later, after I had recovered a bit, I begged my parents for forgiveness. I then shared the day's events and said how grateful I was that a man named Ron helped us when no one else would.

Tears ran down my mother's cheeks as she explained that, on the day of the accident, when she was praying before the image of Our Lady of Schoenstatt, she felt moved to crown Our Lady with a special title and prayed that I would be protected physically and spiritually. That title was "Mother and Queen—Rescue of Nannette." She then showed me the crown she had made of foil with the letters RON written across it.

As I cried in my mother's arms, she said: "My daughter, I have no doubt Our Lord heard my prayers that morning and sent your guardian angel to rescue you."

—Nannette (Figueroa '98) Salasek

I met Tim Rogers at Franciscan in 2000, and we became fast friends. We were both psychology majors, and now, we're both psychologists. He became an Air Force psychologist in 2008. Two years later, shortly before Tim was set to be deployed to Afghanistan, we were presenting together at the American Psychological Association's annual convention in San Diego.

During a break, we took a long walk around the city and found a small chapel in the Little Italy neighborhood. We went in to pray, and Tim went to the front pew, while I stayed in the back. I closed my eyes to pray, and when I looked up, I saw an enormous angel next to Tim. The angel's wing was draped over him like a protective shield. I knew in that moment that with that angel watching over him, Tim would be OK while deployed. Sure enough, he returned home safely from his deployment. We're still great friends.

—Anthony Isacco '02

After finishing the recording of one of the Steubenville Project CDs, I went to pray in the Portiuncula Chapel in thanksgiving. I knelt and began to pray. Then, I heard the most incredibly beautiful music. I don't know where it was coming from. There were only four or five of us in the Port at the time, and the friend I was with heard nothing. But I heard it perfectly. I can't adequately describe it, though. There were several songs, all going on at the same time, but, somehow, they created the most amazing harmonies. It lasted about 30 minutes, and I didn't move the entire time. Normally, I can't kneel for more than 5 to 10 minutes without a lot of pain. But that night, I knelt with no pain or stiffness. I absolutely sensed that I was listening to the songs of the angels in heaven.

—Allison Miller '90

When I was little, I was playing with my younger sister in a large, open field, when a very old woman came walking up to us out of nowhere. When she was about 100 feet away from us, we stopped playing and stared at her. We were your typical, high energy little kids, but we were overcome by a sense of peace and love.

She got right up to us, looked at me for a moment, and said, "What a lucky big brother to have a little sister to love him." Then, she looked down at my sister for a moment, lovingly, and said, "What a lucky little sister to have a big brother to protect her."

Then, she slowly walked away, her back hunched and each step more like a shuffle, leaving us standing there in silence, stunned by the amount of peace and love we felt.

After a minute, she walked out of sight behind a wooden fence that separated the field we were in from a massive parking lot. We ran up to see where she was going. We got to that fence about 10 or 15 seconds after she had gone out of view. She was nowhere to be seen. And there were no cars anywhere near. Unless she had suddenly become an Olympic sprinter, or had a magically silent getaway car going 100 mph awaiting her, it seemed she had simply disappeared. Which confirmed what I was thinking when she was 100 feet away from us and engulfed us in peace. She was an angel in the form of a sweet old woman.

My sister and I both remember this moment vividly, though she was only about 4 years old at the time.

I've often wondered why an angel would have done something so simple and so tender. We weren't being rescued from a burning building. It wasn't a miraculous event. The sky didn't open and turn different colors.

But I think I've only been confused at the simple tenderness of it all because, all these years later, I'm still trying to wrap my head around the simple tenderness of God.

Maybe it was enough that an angel, watching us play, just wanted to express a moment of love for us, and encourage us to keep loving and protecting each other as angels do. Maybe

that angel went to the throne of the Father to ask for permission. And the Father, who had been watching us, too (because to him, children playing in a field next to a parking lot in New Jersey are as worthy of attention as kings and princes), smiled, and said, "Go ahead."

—Chris Stefanick '98

In discerning my vocation, I learned and witnessed that God, through the depths of his mercy, can penetrate any situation. As a college freshman, it became clear to me that God was choosing me to be his bride, but my family situation hindered me from firmly saying yes to him. I was like the farmer with his hand to the plow, looking back at what would be left behind (see Luke 9:62).

Because my Catholic faith and my relationship with Jesus Christ had been rekindled and enlivened as a teen, I had become that child—the one who coaxed her family to attend Mass and receive the sacraments. Thinking of entering the convent and leaving my family to "fend for themselves" brought anxiety and worry. Could I say yes and risk my parents being angry at God, not going to Mass, and maybe even leaving the faith?

On the feast of the guardian angels, I attended Mass on campus. The priest gave a homily in which he told us that in desperate situations we can send our guardian angel to the aid of others in need, giving the person a "double portion" of angel assistance. Though I'd never heard of this concept before, I was desperate for my family. I decided to "try it" and to send my guardian angel to my father. I went to a side chapel (unbeknownst to me, named for "St. Mary of the Angels") and prayed, "Please, Lord, send my guardian angel to my father to work on his heart. When I know my family will be OK in their faith, I will follow you."

Conditional? Yes. But God works with our weaknesses.

Walking back to my dorm after my quick prayer, my cell-phone rang. It was my father, and he was crying. He said, "I want what you have! I've been reading the Bible. How do I get what you have?"

It was the quickest answer to a prayer I have ever received!

—Sister M. Clementia Toalson, FSGM '12

Nancy and I relocated to Providence, Rhode Island, in late summer 1987, so I could obtain an MBA at the University of Rhode Island. It was a time of many spiritual battles for Nancy and me, but on top of this, we were poor college students with one small son and another on the way.

One early morning, I took a jog around the baseball diamond of the nearby park to release stress. The park was empty.

After several laps, I was moving from second base to third and clearly thought, "One more lap and that will do it."

Passing over third toward home plate, I looked over and saw an elderly gentleman on the first base bench. His hair and beard were white as snow. His eyes were crystal blue with a glowing brilliant radiance that I could see from the distance. He was leaning forward in an excited, energetic manner, gazing at me as though I were his prized racehorse. I was amazed at how youthful he appeared.

As I wondered where he came from, his entire presence drew me in. We gazed at each other as I passed him, and he suddenly said in a lively tone, "One more lap and that will do it."

I replied, "Yes, yes, it will."

I then passed over first base toward second and turned around to get a second look at him. He was gone. I stopped and looked around the still-empty park to see what direction he was going. He was nowhere to be seen. As I realized what had just happened, tears welled up in my eyes. I gave a special prayer of thanks to the Lord and jogged home to share the experience with Nancy.

—Danny Luke Fioramonti '84 ■



Check out more angel stories from our alumni at <https://magazine.franciscan.edu/angels-extras>.

Prayer to Your Guardian Angel

Angel of God,
my guardian dear,
To whom God's love
commits me here,
Ever this day,
be at my side,
To light and guard
Rule and guide.

Amen.