

St Michael and All Angels 2015



“I tell you solemnly, you will see heaven laid open and, above the Son of Man, the angels of God ascending and descending.”

The first Christian monks believed that this word of Jesus to Nathanael was as much the basis of their vocation as the texts from the Acts of the Apostles describing the life of the first Christian community in Jerusalem. So together with the terms Apostolic Life and Coenobitic Life, the early monks and nuns used the term Angelic Life to describe the wonderful way to which the Lord had called them to live. So the Belmont Community, that has the privilege of living under the protection of St Michael and All Angels, is a community not just of apostles and coenobites: we are angels, for that is what God has called us to be like, a choir of angels. And the longer you live in the community and get to know the brethren, the more you come to realise how true that is.

Why were the desert fathers so struck by the similarity of a monk's life to that of an angel? To begin with, the Bible constantly tells us that the angels stand in God's presence night and day singing his praises, worshipping his majesty, sharing in his glory, enjoying his presence, seeing his face. That is what a monk seeks to do, through the grace and mercy of God. We are aware of God's presence not only when we gather together in church to celebrate the liturgy, but also in the refectory, the calefactory, the cloister, our cells, the parishes and other places where we work, in fact, wherever we happen to be. The desire to practise continuous prayer leads us to seek God and find him in all the circumstances of our lives, whatever we are doing, and in all people.

The Scriptures also tell us that the angels are God's messengers and servants. Has it ever struck you that only an angel can evangelise? So our vocation, such a tremendous gift of God, calls us to proclaim the truth and the beauty of God's word, the wisdom and the righteousness of his will, his extraordinary and gracious love for creation and for each one of his creatures. At the same time, we are called to serve the monastic community, our brethren, with charity and humility and without murmuring, as St Benedict repeatedly reminds us in the Holy Rule. And there is a wider call to service in the Church and in the world. Just think what Christian monks and nuns have contributed to mankind, to civilization, in so many areas of life.

In our abbey church, we are all aware of the many angels who surround us and accompany us in our prayer: they are just everywhere. Yet, the angels we see depicted in art are only a reminder of the countless angels we cannot see with our eyes but are truly present when we join in their song of adoration: Holy, Holy, Holy. They speak powerfully to us of what and who

we are called to be in the mystery of God's love and the intentions of his Divine heart. May today's feast and this celebration help us remember that we must become as the angels, light as a feather on the breath of God in the singing of his praises, prophetic messengers and obedient servants of the Lord in preaching his word, nothing without Him but everything with Him.

On behalf of the monastic community, I wish you all a very happy feast day and to the brethren, who celebrate the anniversary of a profession or an ordination, every prayer and blessing. May the angels lead us all into paradise today and for ever. Amen.