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Angels

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Angels

We frequently use the word "angels" not as a statement of religious doctrine, but by way of expressing grateful admiration for experiences we have that are benevolent and touched with transcendence. We might say "Oh, she's an angel" of a woman who graciously provides healing for a hurt we have received, or "He's such an angel" of a boy whose patience and cheerfulness in difficult circumstances amazes us. In the 70's song, "I have a dream," the words "I believe in angels" evokes a sense of hopeful optimism in people both young and old. All of us receive help that is at times both surprising and very welcome.

"Angels" evoke aspects of our lives that are at least as important to us as food, clothing, and shelter, finances, politics, and work. Giving and receiving care, having our needs met and seeing to the needs of others, the anticipating of problems and the providing of their solutions are examples of angelic traits that are at the same time our most humanizing qualities. Without these, life is dull and without meaning or purpose. No one can get up in the morning and go to work, or initiate an activity, without having some kind of purpose. We thrive on shared care and concern.

Whether or not we believe angels are involved, we have experiences that can be explained by science only to a certain level, not their ultimate sources. To ascribe some of our experiences to the actions of an angel, or spiritual beings, or God, is at least as reasonable as to elaborate a scientific hypothesis that might partially explain them, but cannot be proven. We did not create the world we live in. Nor did we make ourselves capable of understanding, or of loving. Yet we aspire to grow in both knowledge and love, and we find something angelic both within us and about us as we apply what we learn in life to our welfare and that of others.

We try our best to explain all that we observe in the world. But the more we learn, the more there is to learn, as we continually discover, for example, through the images taken by the Hubble telescope of mysterious objects in deep space. We cannot wait to achieve complete comprehension of either the physical universe or even of our own individual thought processes before making decisions and moving ahead with life. Using a word like angels when we try to describe some of the very practical and personal help we receive for negotiating challenges in life is in accord with reality, but we cannot prove to anyone that we have received assistance from a source outside ourselves.

If we rely on our sense of honesty when we explain to ourselves or others the encounters we have with "angels," our sense of gratitude will grow. Otherwise we might be inappropriately concerned about what "they" might say. We do not need their approval to use concepts and names that we and other sane and good people find acceptable. We need the approval of our hearts as we seek words and concepts to identify the experiences we have.

We can take some words of Scripture as a starting point for imagining all kinds of personal, caring help that we receive along our way, from spirits giving us inspired thoughts to friends and family members supporting us with encouraging words: "He has given his angels orders about you to guard you wherever you go." (Ps. 91:11)

Reflecting about angels is another way of counting blessings. Rather than examining our hours and days for all that went wrong, we choose to look for those experiences – even those that might be painful – where we have been enabled to live as beloved children of God.

Angels: Welcome, all.