

are hindrances if we hold to them. God wants us for himself. Don't rest in the gift but on him the giver. 'None else but thee, Lord.' Immense faith, abiding hope, eternal love. Sunshine or shadow, all are good for him. Conscious of God under all, we are poor but possessing all things. We should make the thought of eternal life something that steadies us; it enables us to put our hands down below everything and grip the hands of God. Faith helps us, hope helps us, Love—the Holy Ghost helps us, shows us life eternal. We are professed on our deathbed, this all passes, God never changes. God will be always with us even in the valley of the shadow of death. God fills *all* the world. There are not two worlds, but one world; and God fills the world and our heart.

## THE SPEECH OF ANGELS

BY

WALTER JEWELL



IN a previous study concerning knowledge after death, we saw that men are the lowest of all intelligent beings, the infants of the spiritual universe. In this life knowledge has to be presented to us pictorially through the senses, for like children we need our crayons and our blocks.

We need them no less for expression. We not only look at pictures, but paint them. We respond to the music of life by striking its chords. No matter how profoundly spiritual the thought of the mystic, he must convey it, if at all, by lips and hands and images drawn from the material world about him.

This being so, how shall we view the life and speech of angels? We know them to be, not unions of spirit and matter, but purely spiritual beings. These intricate bodily organisms of ours are totally unnecessary to them, for angelic knowledge goes behind all colour, sound and texture to the inner nature of created things. This kind of knowledge is at present a closed book to us, although a book that death must open.

We should not suppose, however, that the glory and splendour of the earth and sky mean nothing to an angel. Scripture tells us that at creation the morning stars praised God together, and the sons of God made joyful melody. Angels, even more than men, marvel at the universe, but they do not approach it through sight and sound. Their mode of knowledge lies within, just as all their life is beyond the veil of the senses.

In our approach to them, we make much use of analogy and symbol. Knowing that space is no handicap to them, we put wings on their shoulders. Because spirit does not age, we stamp youth upon their forms and faces. The expressions we use to describe their life are born of the conditions of mother earth, and can be quite helpful if we see them as stepping-stones and not as horizons.

For example, we say that most of the angels *see* God and have their knowledge in that vision, without supposing for a moment that they have bodily eyes. For ourselves we frequently use the expression: 'Oh, I see', not meaning that someone has switched on the light, but simply referring to the clearance of some mental fog which has obscured the train of thought. If we can talk of seeing when we mean a spiritual operation, we need make no rule against discussing the sight of angels.

A similar situation arises when considering angelic speech. Should we employ that term at all of pure spirits, or would it not be better to depict heaven as filled with eloquent silence? There is no doubt that silence can be most expressive. We know the silence of lovers and the hush at High Mass when the organ and choir pause for the consecration. Yet silences of this kind are, in reality, a form of speech. We use them, knowing that they definitely convey a message from one mind to another.

In our thought we have kinship with the angels, and to understand their speech we must look within ourselves. There we find, underlying all our outward expressions, the fact of interior speech.

This inner conversation is quite a normal experience. Consider a father settling down to assist with his son's homework. Some, at least, of the knowledge that he requires is stored within the depths of his memory. But he seldom reverts to it, having more immediate problems than the campaigns of Julius Caesar in Gaul. By an act of the will he has to reach into his memory and draw up into present consideration those shadowy figures of the past. He thus connects his boyhood with his manhood, instructs himself, and carries on an internal conversation.

By a further act of the will, he makes known to his son the result of his efforts. But to do this he must array his thoughts in speech—they must be conveyed on the vehicle of his mother tongue. Both father and son are profoundly united to intricate bodily organisms which provide the normal and proper means of communication between them. The spiritual must move along the paths of matter.

But among the angels this necessity has never arisen, save only when they have had some communication to make to the world of men. They have deep and far-reaching knowledge within themselves, and can and do determine to bestow it upon other spirits lower in

the scale. Knowledge and will suffice, and spirit enters into direct communication with spirit.

In fact, one angel enlightens another in the very act of his approach. There is already warmth in a man's body, but if he sits before a fire, the heat embraces him and he is warmer still. In a somewhat analogous way a spirit finds enlightenment and power when embraced by another of a higher order.

The spirits who see God see also the world which he has made, and read creation in the Creator. But with angels, as with men, there are varying perfections in the beatific vision, and so the wide variety of all that God has made is not appreciated to the same extent by all. The higher angel needs to 'break up' his knowledge and give it out in a particular manner to lesser beings who, though spiritual like himself, are less comprehensive in their grasp of knowledge. Thus all 'make the first circle' in eternal truth, and are yet able to pass truth to each other.

In heaven all knowledge is held in common, and the position could not be otherwise. God having given himself so richly and intimately to all, the spirits possessing him could not fail to form a perfect community and to be fully available to each other. And so the light falls generously from order to order of the blessed spirits, being made understandable to each of them as it descends. From the highest seraphim it flows to illuminate at last the lowliest disembodied soul of man in heaven who, although he really sees God, can yet learn from spirits who see him better.

We might note here that the angelic interest in man is acute in all the orders. He is the union of spirit and matter, the two great fields of God's creation. In the Incarnation God himself became man, but never an angel, and his human mother is the Queen of heaven. Man is the infant of the spiritual universe, but even here on earth we all tend to become the servants of the baby. Neither should we forget that grace can make men equal to the angels, although I do not propose to enter into that mysterious matter here.

St Thomas introduces a curious little question. He reminds us that in the vision of Isaias the seraphim *cried* to each other. A voice is usually uplifted in order to cross an intervening space more effectively, and so he asks whether the angels speak under the conditions of local distance. He replies, of course, that angelic speech is intellectual, and that the 'crying' signifies the greatness or intensity of what is being conveyed. A further consideration is that there really exists a distance between the angels, even those belonging to the same order, although not of a sort that can be measured. This distance is covered by the wordless speech of an angel raised in spiritual strength and power, and directed to the lesser spirit receiving it. He,

enlightened and profoundly interested, makes his response, and there is true conversation in heaven.

When one man wishes to speak to another he attracts his attention, usually by a brief word or ejaculation. But there is nothing corresponding to this in the language of heaven. In God the spirit sees the angelic hosts ranged in beauty and power, and is at once aware of any approach to himself. These approaches are frequent, because, as we have seen, knowledge in heaven is common property. The food gathered by the higher spirits is at once passed to those below, and made palatable to them by angelic art. There is something particularly satisfying to the mind in the thought of angelic teachers, and we can be sure that beyond the veil of sense they are waiting for us, their prospective pupils.

Angelic conversation can be quite private and personal, for the wealth of knowledge available to all can be taught individually. And so the question arises as to whether an angel, or the soul of man for that matter, can enter into personal conversation with God. If spirit converses with spirit, what of the supreme creative Spirit?

The idea is awe-inspiring, and our first thought is that nothing quite so individual is to be expected. But then we remember that God's treatment of his creatures is intensely individual. Examples leap to the mind like individual creation, personal salvation, the holy Eucharist and the confessional. Further, every angel and every soul in heaven holds his own particular place in that scheme of things in which God is adored and served. There are millions of angels, but no mere duplicate of any angel. Even the soul of man is a particular gift from the hand of God, and is different and distinct from its fellows. Every created spirit is, or should be, a religious order in himself. He is made by God for God, to serve him with all the individuality and peculiar powers that are his. The spiritual universe, like the material, is designed and ordered. Divine Wisdom does nothing without a perfectly good reason, and every spirit has his proper place in the divine economy. In consequence, individual conversation between God and those spirits who see him in his essence is to be expected. Moreover, God has work for the angels, of which services men have had personal experience. Who can doubt that Raphael, Michael and Gabriel had received definite instructions from the heart of the beatific vision, and had responded in that wordless speech which is the language of angels?

The speech of the angels is to become ours. Death alone will bring this about by introducing us to the spiritual realm and the spiritual tongue. It is true that we are not accustomed to direct speech from spirit to spirit without the use of word, gesture or symbol. But it will not be beyond our natural powers, although less natural to us

than the use of tongue or pen. When we die, we shall certainly direct our mental concept outwards, as we have always done, yet without robing it in the fashion of speech. The answer will come in the same manner, and we shall appreciate it.

But of course our hope goes far beyond this. In the beatific vision angelic speech takes on the cadence of the divine, in the sense of being beyond all natural powers, and we are invited to join those conversations. By grace we may hope to speak to God and in God with familiar ease, and to 'hear' that voice in obedience to which the entire universe entered into being.

## A SERMON FOR THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS<sup>1</sup>

BY

THE VENERABLE BEDE

(Translated by Vincent Kerns, M.S.F.S.)



ODAY, dearly beloved, we are celebrating the feast of all the saints in one joyous solemnity. Those saints whose fellowship is the delight of heaven; whose protection is the joy of earth; whose triumphs are the Church's crown; whose confessing of the Faith glows brighter in esteem, the braver their torments made it. For the harder the fight the greater the warriors' glory; and many and varied are the sufferings which furnish the triumph of martyrdom. As the severity of their tortures increases, so too does the reward. Our Mother, the Catholic Church, extending far and wide throughout the world, was clearly taught by Christ Jesus, her Head, to fear neither insults, nor tortures, nor even death itself. Strengthened ever more and more, not by resistance but by endurance, she was the inspiration of the triumphal glory of all those whom the penalty of imprisonment brought together in a glorious army, with one and the same ardent courage to fight the battle.

O truly blessed Mother Church! so resplendent with the honour of God's esteem, so radiant with the glorious blood of triumphant martyrs, arrayed so splendidly in the dazzling virginity of their unsullied confession! Neither roses nor lilies are wanting among her

<sup>1</sup> Migne: *Patrologia Latina*, vol. xciv, col. 450. (*Homiliae Bedae Venerabilis Subdiacac*—hom. lxx.) Extracts from this sermon form the lessons of the second nocturn for the feast of All Saints and within the Octave in the Roman Breviary.