

29th September 2021

Angels

**“Do not forget to entertain strangers:
for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”**

Bible, Hebrews 13:2

In a poem from his collection “Songs and Sonnets” entitled *Air and Angels*, John Donne writes in praise of his loved one:

*Twice or thrice had I loved thee
Before I knew thy face or name;
So, in a voice, so in a shapeless flame,
Angels affect us oft, and worshipped be.*

And when the English novelist, painter and art-critic, Wyndham Lewis, viewed figures in Stanley Spencer’s paintings with a somewhat jaundiced eye, he is reported to have described them as “angels in jumpers”.

Today, on the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels in the Christian tradition, I want to suggest with John Donne that “angels affect us oft”, if only we were to give our mind to it, and that’s because we have the opportunity to meet – or even to be – “angels in jumpers”.

An angel is a direct link to the mystery of the divine. The word “angel” has its root in the Latin word *angelus*, which is itself borrowed from the Greek *angelos*, which means “messenger”. Not surprisingly, therefore, angels are regularly placed in stories where a message from God is being delivered – an angel visiting Daniel, Mary’s Annunciation through an angel and the choir of angels over Bethlehem when Christ was born, for example.

But I find angels more “earthy” than that. Through their human ministrations to us, we have a glimpse of something beyond the human – dare I say mystical, divine or holy? A simple act of comfort; courage in the face of adversity; unconditional compassion; a self-sacrificial action; a word of meaning when it is most needed. These can lift us above the ordinary, to a place of mystery, beauty and wonder. And all of that – and much more besides – is in your hands and mine to offer.

Our world needs to heed the words of the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews and recognise that we have all “entertained angels unawares”, even you and me as “angels in jumpers”.

A prayer for today

Unawares? I hope not, Lord, for I don’t want to miss you in the next angel I meet. Amen