

THE CATHOLIC PARISH OF KING'S LYNN

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Scripture Reference

ANGELS AND ANIMALS

When Christ our Lord was fasting in the wilderness He was with the wild beasts, and angels ministered unto Him.

From scripture and tradition we know quite a lot about angels. They were created before us and greatly outnumber the human creation. Angels are greater than us in intelligence, knowledge, power, and beauty, notwithstanding the unique dignity bestowed on human nature by the hypostatic union in Christ, and the fact of our redemption.

The primary task of the angels is to glorify and serve our Creator. Their secondary task is the protection of His human creatures and the care of our salvation: "*He shall give His angels charge over thee; to guard thee in all thy ways.*" (Ps.91:11).

Our Guardian Angels have a special role: "*From infancy to death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.*" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, para.336)

What of animals? In their own way they also reflect the Almighty's artistry and something of His infinite beauty. Perhaps that is easier to grasp in the case of a domestic pet than in the case of scorpions, spiders, and squid.

Many people who are fond of animals find it hard to accept the opinion that nothing of them survives physical death. A theologian as great as St.Thomas Aquinas thought they do not. But that particular item of St. Thomas' wide-ranging deductive speculations has never been defined by the Church one way or the other.

Blessed John Henry Newman believed that we know more about angels than we know about animals:

"We have more real knowledge about the Angels than about the brutes. They have apparently passions, habits, and a certain accountableness, but all is mystery about them. We do not know whether they can sin or not, whether they are under punishment, whether they are to live after this life. We inflict very



great sufferings on a portion of them, and they in turn, every now and then, seem to retaliate upon us, as if by a wonderful law. We depend on them in various important ways; we use their labour, we eat their flesh. This however relates to such of them as come near us: cast your thoughts abroad on the whole number of them, large and small, in vast forests, or in the water, or in the air; and then say whether the presence of some countless multitudes, so various in their natures, so strange and wild in their shapes, living on the earth without ascertainable object, is not as mysterious as anything which Scripture says about the Angels? Is it not plain to our senses that there is a world inferior to us in the scale of beings, with which we are connected without understanding what it is?

(Parochial and Plain Sermons, vol.4, sermon 13)