

September 28, 2008

The construction of the steel mills at the very southern end of Lake Michigan led to the founding of the City of Gary in 1906. At that time, there were no parishes here. Father Thomas Jensen, a young priest serving at St. Bridget's in Hobart, was assigned by the Bishop of Fort Wayne to start a new mission in Gary. That mission soon flourished and became Holy Angels Parish with the large numbers of immigrants coming to work at the mills. Eventually, Holy Angels would become a mother parish to most of the other Gary parishes which would be formed from it to serve the increasing number of Catholics.

Pope Pius XII established the four northwestern-most counties of the Diocese of Fort Wayne as the new Diocese of Gary in 1957. He appointed Father Andrew Grutka as its first bishop and named Holy Angels as the Cathedral. The Cathedral is the mother church of the diocese. As all Catholics claim a particular parish as their own, they can also claim the Cathedral as their very own. The Cathedral is a sign of the unity that all members of the diocese have with the bishop and with one another in Christ.

Thursday is the Feast of the Holy Angels. The feast is celebrated solemnly in our Cathedral, but might well be celebrated in a special way by each one of us. I have always had a devotion to my guardian angel. One of the first prayers that I was taught by my parents was the prayer to my guardian angel. Very likely you were also taught this prayer at a young age.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we are taught: "Angels are spiritual creatures who glorify God without ceasing and who serve His saving plans for other creatures: 'The angels work together for the benefit of us all'" (No. 350 with the quote coming from St. Thomas Aquinas).

Angels are purely spiritual creatures with intelligence and free will. They are personal and immortal. They surpass in perfection all visible creatures.

Christ is the center of the angelic world. Angels belong to Him because they were created through Him and for Him. St. Paul tells us: “For in Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through Him and for Him” (Col 1:16).

Angels are often depicted in the Old Testament. They are usually described as the Lord’s messengers who speak to people on earth about God’s desires. God sends angels to persons in every day places and situations to remind them that He loves them and watches over them with His Providence. Thus, we can say that angels are agents of God’s own care and protection for His people. Their mission is always associated with God’s plan of salvation for us. They remind us of God’s deep love for us and His abiding Providence over us.

The Opening Prayer and Concluding Prayer for the Mass of the Holy Angels describes the role of angels in our lives very succinctly. In the Opening Prayer, we pray: “God, Our Father, in a wonderful way you guide the work of angels and men. May those who serve you constantly in heaven keep our lives safe from all harm on earth. Grant this through Christ...”

In the Concluding Prayer, we pray: “Lord, hear the prayers of those you renew with the Bread of Life. Made strong by the courage it gives, and under the watchful care of the angels, may we advance along the way of salvation.”

In our liturgies, the angels join us in our praise of God. At every Mass, we conclude the Preface by praying: “Through Christ, Our Lord, the great army of angels rejoices in your glory. In adoration and joy, we make their hymn of praise our own – Holy, Holy, Holy.”

In one of the Eucharistic Prayers, the priest prays to God: “Ask that your angel may take this sacrifice to your altar in heaven.” In the funeral liturgies, we pray: “May the angels lead you into paradise.”

You may want to enlist the intercession or guidance of your guardian angel from time-to-time through the day or at the beginning or end of the day with the prayer my parents taught me: “Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God’s love commits me here. Ever this day (night) be at my side to light and to guard, to rule and to guide. Amen.”

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On Friday of this week, we celebrate the Feast of St. Theodora Guerin. St. Theodora was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on Oct. 15, 2006, in St. Peter’s Square. She has particular relevance for us Hoosiers as she lived and died serving the people of our state, especially by opening schools in the 1840s and ‘50s.

St. Theodora Guerin was born in France in 1798 as the French Revolution was drawing to a close. She entered the Sisters of Providence in 1823. Known then as Sister St. Theodore, she taught and cared for the sick and poor in France for 17 years.

In 1840, At the request of the Bishop of Vincennes, Mother Theodore led a group of five Sisters of Providence to establish a motherhouse and novitiate, to educate children of pioneer families, and to care for the sick poor in the Diocese of Vincennes, which included the entire State of Indiana and half of Illinois. She was not welcomed with open arms by the local population, but often suffered ridicule, disdain, and mistreatment. Nonetheless, she had much success in promoting vocations and within three years, her community had 24 novices.

Before she died on May 14, 1856, having labored 16 years in Indiana, St. Theodora founded 10 Catholic schools throughout the state, in addition to the motherhouse of the Sisters of Providence at St. Mary-of-the-Woods.

We can learn much from St. Theodora Guerin, a humble woman known for her courage and especially her faith and total trust in God's Providence. She relied completely on prayer and had a great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Way of the Cross.

A member of her community described St. Theodora's spirituality in this way: "Her spirituality was based on a deep and personal relationship with Jesus; on a pragmatic acceptance of whatever came as a gift of God; on a deep and genuine love of everyone, no matter who they were; on a fundamentally common sense approach to life that saw all of life as gift, sometimes happy, sometimes not; and on a belief that the natural world carried with it powerful messages for all of us human beings.

I invite you to join me in learning from her example and seeking her intercession. St. Theodora Guerin, pray for us!