

Feast of Sts. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.

29/9/26

The Benedictine life is a very human way of keeping body and soul together - a search for God, or rather, a being found by God in very material circumstances: a practical life where we practise incarnation. Famously, the tools of the garden are to be treated with as much respect as the vessels on the altar, and even more so than people, all the sacred vessels God has chosen to put in our way. 'Put in our way' - now there's an ambiguous phrase, highlighting the battle of wills that is also always going on, a battle of wills which goes on at many levels and can be configured in terms of individual spirits: us jockeying for position on earth, or nations at war, or heavenly powers against evil ones. Immediately we are in the realm of metaphor, with angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, with disciples under fig trees being invited to 'come and see', to see in a way how there are not two realms at work here, but one suffused with God or, in the words of the New Collegeville Bible Commentary, with regard to today's passage from Paul:

"History is shot through with divine purpose and activity, but the divine purposes work in and through their earthly counterparts, not over and above them. In other words, the struggle of the Jewish people to remain faithful to their God and their law is God's own work represented by the activity of such heavenly beings as 'One like a Son of Man'."

We think we are living a humdrum life which God occasionally monitors or tweaks here and there to give us a better day or a sense of direction. No, it's all God and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, or in an important caveat, in the 'Cloud of Unknowing', as if the author suddenly realises he may be leading his readers too far in the spiritual quest:

"God forbid that I should separate what has been joined together, the body and the spirit, for it is God's will to be served both in body and soul together." (48:212)

This is God among the pots and pans and angels ascending and descending on the Great Ouse.

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