

## Homily by Deacon Peery Duderstadt: *Archangels*

I thought that today I would share with you the three archangels whom we celebrate and which grace the walls of our master bedroom at our cottage in Fish Creek, Door County. We closed the cottage for the season last weekend. So, I brought the icons back with me having already gotten permission to preach today's Mass. Icons are a significant form of religious art that particularly appeals to me, and it is also part of an OLB tradition with Frs. Rogala and Moran. For many years I brought these icons to the Mass in the chapel for the Feast Day and have done so today. I invite you to come up after Mass a take a closer look at them. These are all original icons, so please look but do not touch.

The received tradition is that icons are not painted as such, but rather they are "written". While each icon is different, they are all sourced from a common copy book with the colors predefined and the objects they hold are likewise predefined. The artist may work in different dimensions, writing in a larger icon or smaller icon and - depending upon the culture - may add words identifying the subject, in this case the names of the archangels in English. The Greek Orthodox would have them in Greek and the Russian Orthodox in old Slavonic.

I acquired the icons of *Michael* and *Gabriel* at a gallery in Door County and asked if there was an icon of *Raphael*. I was directed to contact the artist, whom I in turn commissioned to write that icon so that I would have a complete set. The theology of writing icons refers to them as windows to heaven. The icon is a means to an end...and the archangels certainly were that in their various roles as given in their names. They are all Hebrew words and they tell us something about the archangel. But first a word about the name. It is composed of two Greek words *arch* (first or head) and *angelos* (messenger). As Pope St. Gregory observed: [read from the Office readings]

The word "El" is the oldest name for God in Hebrew. So *Michael* is two words: *micah* (like) and *El* (God) together they become *Like God*. Michael appears a number of times in our scriptures. He is referred to as the Prince of Israel and whom Joshua encounters before the destruction of Jericho. He appears again in the Book of Daniel, which we'll read in the last week of Ordinary Time, and also in the Book of Revelation (in the first reading today) where he ultimately conquers Satan. He is the patron of security forces. He is portrayed with a staff and a globe symbolizing the Kingdom of God with four Greek letters: The *Chi* and the *Rho* which are the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek, and the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet: *Alpha and Omega* indicating the Beginning and the End.

*Raphael* is also an Old Testament figure appearing in the Book of Tobit which we read in the Ninth week of Ordinary Time this year. The name again is two words: *rapha* (remedy) and *El* (God) together they become *God's Remedy*. He is the patron of travelers and the blind. In the Book of Tobit he accompanies Tobias on a journey on behalf of his father Tobit. When they return, Raphael cures Tobit of his blindness using fish gall. He is portrayed with a staff and a fish. For Christians the fish takes on an additional symbolic meaning. The word fish in Greek is *ichthus*. Early Christians used the word as an anagram: spelling out "*Jesus Christos Theou Uious Soter*"...Jesus Christ Son of God Savior. This was before the Cross became a more acceptable symbol...and the fish chalked on a wall meant nothing to the non-Christian.

*Gabriel* we encounter in the New Testament specifically in the Gospel of Luke in what is called the Infancy Narrative. He is the patron of telecommunications and the postal service. The name again is two words: *gabri* (strength) and *El* (God) which together become *God's Strength*. He too holds a staff, a sign of authority in each case and his right hand open in a sign of peace. We know him as the archangel who appears to Mary and gives her the message of what God is calling her to do. He is the medium as it were for the strength she receives. The meaning of these archangels lies not in themselves as individuals but the role and message they are given in the process of salvation history. Let us be attuned to the role and message God has given to us.