



SACRED WINDOWS

Sunday — September 21, 2025

God-Painted Birds and Ravishing Spirits

Greetings!

Stunning nature scenes and the amazing beauty of animal life **are clear windows** through which we can get a glimpse of God's grandeur, His artistry, His creative genius.

I don't want to reduce God's actions to human categories, but I can't help but think of natural beauty as God showing off a little, like a genius painter or sculptor showing his masterpiece to a stunned audience: "*Behold!*" as he whisks away the sheet covering His work. God displays **many bright sparks of His glory in creation** and in many places in Scripture it says that He delights in His work.

The only difference is that God doesn't need our stamp of approval on His creation, but **His children benefit greatly** when we behold His glory. Beauty raises our minds and hearts upward and prepares us for worship.

Invisible Beauty

Consider another dimension of the matter. If beauty visible to the bodily eye is so stunning, **imagine how magnificent spiritual beauty** will be when we finally are free to behold it directly in the life of the spirit.

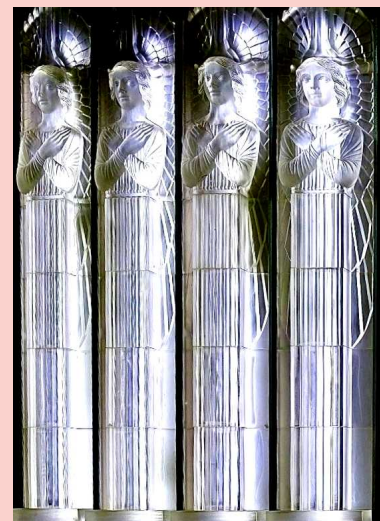
In that vein, **I often wonder about the beauty of angels** and what it will be like to see them directly in their festal garb (Heb 12:22).

The easiest gauge of how ravishing angels must be are the reactions of people in the Bible **when the angels visit them** in visible form: the recipients of those visions usually *faint!*

Which leads me to an interesting question. Could the God-painted, **impressive birds of nature** be a kind of training for our spiritual senses so that we can one day appreciate the spiritual beauty of angels?

It's only a hypothesis, but I think it's a good bet. (The wings are a dead giveaway.) I'm going to go a little quixotic here and **pair many of our world's wonderful birds with spiritual beings** using the categories given to us by the Catholic Tradition—specifically, the nine choirs of angels.

As we approach the great feasts of the Archangels (9/29) and Guardian Angels (10/2), I hope my analysis will serve as **an imaginative catechetical lesson** to bring joy to angel and bird



lovers alike. Let's start with the top echelon of angels:

Angels of Heaven (Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones)

These are the angels closest to God and those who hold the greatest power and authority over His Kingdom, visible and invisible. They **immediately behold His face** and thus are often described in God's attributes: fire (holiness), eyes (omniscience), and thrones (power).

The Glorious Seraphim

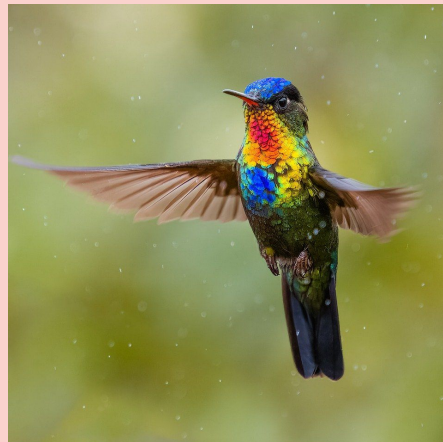
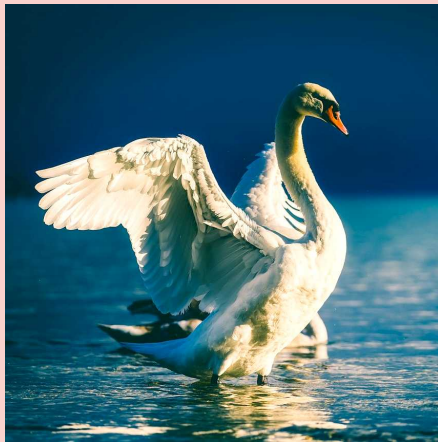


These angels are dedicated to pure worship. They are described as flames (Rev 4:5) because **their Hebrew name means “burning ones”**. In the Book of Isaiah, they are depicted with six wings and hover over the prophet (Is 6:1-3) while singing the divine praises: “Holy, Holy, Holy!”

We get just a glimpse of their glory in the Bible but I believe that glory also resonates in a few of the **magnificent birds of the natural world**.

I think of the holy Seraphim when I watch hummingbirds fly. It is the only bird on earth who can hover perfectly still in the air. The **brilliant, iridescent coloring** on some of them can also, at times, give the impression of flames.

Perhaps the other more glorious **seraphim-like bird on this earth is the majestic swan**. He doesn't have six wings but he's glorious with just two. He's also mostly silent in this world until he sings his glorious “swan song” at the end.



The Ferocious Cherubim

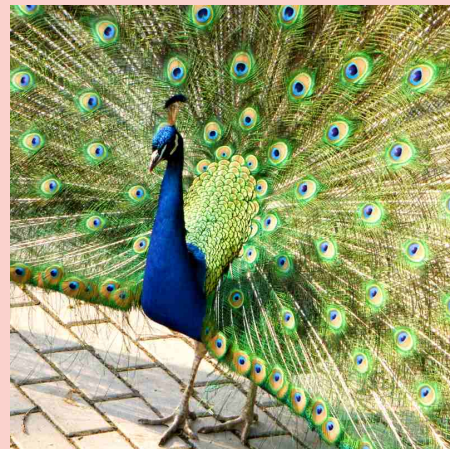
Here is a case where it is **impossible to find even a remote parallel** to any single creature in the animal world. The Bible describes these angels as having four faces of natural animals—human, ox, lion, and eagle (I'll get to the eagle below)—but that is a reflection of their immense power and unfathomable beings.

Cherubim are described in the Book of Ezekiel as being covered with bright eyes, indicating that **they contemplate the wisdom of God** day and night. In the Book of Revelation, the Cherubim initiate the heavenly liturgy and draw all other creatures into the worship of God.

Eyes, eyes, and more eyes. **Wisdom and worship**. What birds parallel these characteristics on earth? The wise and beautiful eyes are telling: owls and peacocks.

Owls have been symbols of wisdom since at least the time of Aesop's Fables. Their large eyes can see their prey at night and easily **remind us of an all-seeing angel**. They appear calm but are literally ferocious when on the hunt.

And peacocks, well, they are **just heavenly birds**. The eye-like decorations on their feathers don't have literal sight, but if you were that gorgeous, all eyes would be looking at you instead.



The Mighty Thrones



As the name suggests, these angels are **custodians of the Throne of God** and His throne room. The only direct reference we have in Scripture to these angels is St. Paul's mention of the name in Colossians 1:16. I also believe they are the angels described as "the 24 elders" in the Book of Revelation 4:4 **who sit on thrones** and throw down their crowns in worship.

Their characteristics are stability, firmness, strength, solidity, like a royal throne. Could they have been the ones who **assisted St. Michael in casting out the devil** from heaven when he rebelled? I think so. It's their job to preside in strength over the heavenly realm.

What birds would mirror these marvelous spiritual beings? They would have to be **solid and intimidating birds**. My first guess is the Emperor Penguin. The name fits such royal dignity, right? This one has a couple of oddball cousins with strange crown-like growths on their heads.

I also like the **Ostrich, standing 6'9"** and weighing in at 229 lbs. He's as bizarre as a cherub and is one of the most impressive and even dangerous creatures of the bird world. Who needs wings when you can run like the wind? Okay, I didn't claim they were pretty, just solid and a bit fearsome. (In the pictures below, **the crazy cousin** is to the right. Obviously. He is called a Crested Penguin.)



Angels of the Universe (Dominions, Virtues, Powers)

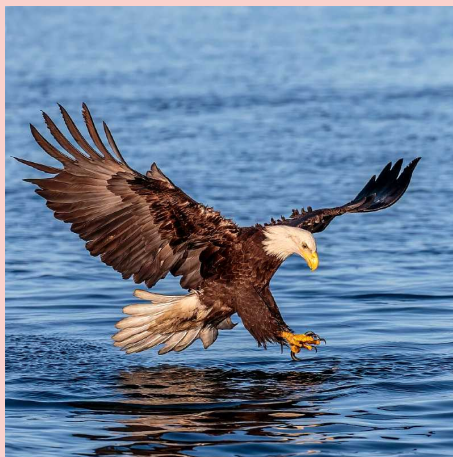
This middle echelon of angels are seen as the angels who have power over the universe, space, the atmosphere, and the elements of the world. They are the least known to us because **their names only appear in St. Paul's letters** without descriptors other than “spirits of the air” (in Rom, Eph, Col, and 1 Cor)—including fallen angels of the same choirs—but they are the most likely to influence the way things work in the world. And for that reason, the birds associated with them are powerful.

The Masterful Dominions

Also called “Dominations”, these angels are literally the masters of the universe. They make everything run according to God’s plan and oversee all that goes on below Heaven. To use a human analogy, **they are the Joint Chiefs of Staff** of the heavenly host: they command, supervise, and set strategic policy for the right ordering of things.

What birds would dare qualify to mirror this rank of angels to us? Only the most mighty and powerful. All **eagles** immediately come to mind [[here](#) is a website featuring 32 different species of eagles!] For Americans, **the magnificent Bald Eagle** is especially dear, but the Golden Eagle is equally impressive.

For water birds, **the awesome Great White Pelican** fits the, um, “bill” (gosh, sorry for the pun). If you’ve ever seen one of those guys swoop down head first from forty feet in the air to catch fish under the surface, you know it’s a bird to reckon with.



The Most Excellent Virtues

Our theology tell us the Virtue Angels preside over the universe like the Chief Operating Officers of companies. The traditional meaning of “**virtue**” is **something akin to power or strength** in the natural order and supreme goodness in the moral order. These angels infuse vitality and goodness into everything, keeping the universe

running according to the plans given them from above.



I envision them as the most diverse and interesting members of the heavenly host. Because of their supreme excellence in every category, they fill the universe with God's manifold love and **order everything toward beauty, mystery, and joy**. There is a strand of theology that credits them with exorcistic powers, which may be true, but I believe that power is more proper to the next set of angels, as we'll see.

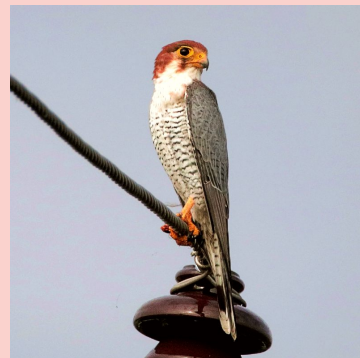
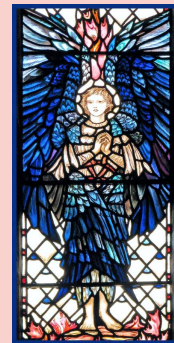
My avian choices for parallels with these angels are **all the most interesting, hilarious, and personality-plus birds on earth**: Parrots, Flamingos, Woodpeckers, Kookaburras, Toucans, Kingfishers, Mocking Birds, Cranes, Herons, Cockatoos, etc. There is endless beauty, goodness, and virtuous joy with these.



The Fierce Powers

These angels are definitely the Raptors of the spiritual world. They are **the street cops, the non-commissioned officers of the army**, the organizers and enforcers who maintain order against the awful fallen angels. Only in heaven will we know how well they have preserved us from imminent harm and spiritual evil.

The natural world parallels are easy to see: **predatory birds like Hawks, Kestrels, Falcons, Vultures, and Kites**. Fierce is the word.



Angels of the World (Principalities, Archangels, Angels)

This lowest group of angels are by no means the maternal beings we see on holy cards. They are **vastly superior to humans** in the spiritual faculties (intellect and will) and exercise their powerful ministries over the natural world, the earth, and the human sphere. They are low men on the totem pole only in relation to the other angels whose ministries are in the higher realms.

The Soaring Principalities

Principalities relate to princes, that is, to the **governors of human communities** both organic (like families, religious orders, and parishes) and political (like nations, international organizations). They are probably the angels who produce signs in the heavens



when God so decrees (perhaps the Star of Bethlehem? The Miracle of the Sun at Fatima?)

They also exercise influence over those humans who govern or rule us. Sometimes we wish they would do a better job in that, but who am I to judge an angel? We get the sense that they soar over the world looking down on the affairs of men with their watchful eyes, and **only God knows how much evil they prevent** from happening in the world.

So, *majestic soaring birds* seem to be perfect parallels to them in the natural world: the **awe-inspiring condors, albatrosses, arctic terns**. Even swallows who serve in certain ways as signs in the heavens (think of the Capistrano Swallows).

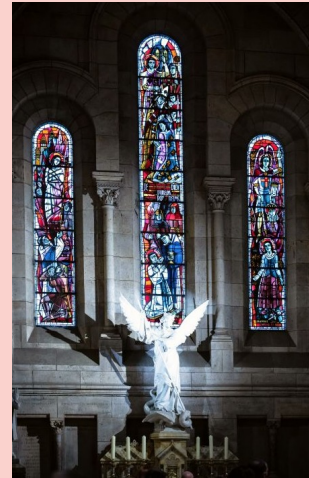


The Fabulous Archangels

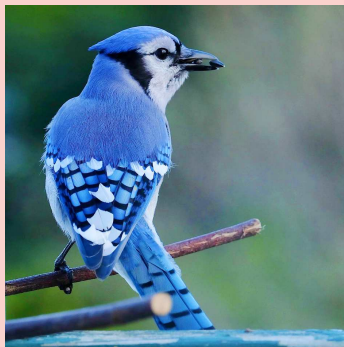
Isn't it interesting that only three proper names of angels are revealed to us in Scripture? Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. God deprives us of all other names because **He doesn't want us falling into the idolatry** of angels. Smart.

This angelic triad, however, mirrors the Holy Trinity in a most perfect way so their names are revealed to us. They are the **greatest messengers of God to men** and interact with human beings in matters of the highest importance for our salvation. They communicate God's will with perfect clarity and brilliance.

I liken them to the **primary colors of the light spectrum**: red, blue, and yellow. All other colors visible to man derive from these three as do the missions of all the angels below them who interact with men.



For that reason, we can see in natural birds three beautiful parallels to the Archangels: the Cardinal, the Blue Jay, and the Oriole. **Brilliant, magnificent, radiant birds.**



The Humble Guardian Angels

The teaching of the Church tells us that God assigns a particular angel to each human being He creates. They accompany us on our



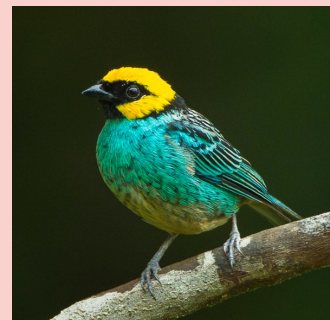
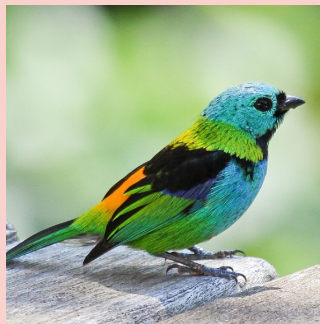
way through life to the ultimate goal of reaching our heavenly home. Let's just admit that **these guys have the hardest jobs of all the angels!**

Angels minister to us invisibly, as the familiar prayer says: "to light, to guard, to rule and guide", among other things. They are **mentors and servants of our souls** even though we rarely notice their presence. "The relation of the human soul to its own guardian angel is closer and more intense than any other mode of relation within the created universe." (Judith Lang, *The Angels of God: Understanding the Bible*, 1997).

One might even imagine that angels are chosen for us by God with deliberate intent, as if matching us with those spiritual beings who are **most attuned to our personalities** and weaknesses. I guess we'll find out the truth of the angels at a later date.

For the diversity of human personalities, I think the best parallels are probably the widest range of **beautiful, humble, and musical birds on the earth**: song birds, parakeets, finches, tanagers, buntings,

and the humble sparrows.



Alas, we've come to the end of the angelic choirs: **How I would love to talk about** the birds and angels all day!

In closing, I wonder if the angels **appreciate being compared to simple creatures** with wings. In fact, I do think they love it because they also have marvelous senses of humor. That is a characteristic of great and pure minds. It's probably also a good trait to have when you work with humans...or read Peter Darcy articles.

Holy Archangels and Angels, pray for us who have recourse to thee!

Thank you and many blessings to you wonderful Sacred Windows readers and your families!

Peter Darcy

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