

Be Sure Not to Do the Wrong Work

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



November 8 is a day when the Church commemorates angels—not only the Archangel Michael, who is named, but "all the other bodiless powers" as well.

Among these other celestial beings is the Archangel Jehudiel, who like the others has a special role in God's plan. Jehudiel is known as the angel of work. In particular, he watches over those who work for God's glory, encouraging them, strengthening them and giving them wisdom.

On this same day and the previous day, we read Colossians 2:13 to 3:3. In these verses Saint Paul writes about angels, but he is not describing the kind of benevolent care that Jehudiel and the others have for us. He is concerned that some people misunderstand what angels are, and give them a kind of respect that should be offered only to God.

Paul's worry is that false teachers are exerting great influence over the Colossian Christians. These teachers seem outwardly to be following the Gospel's warnings against self-indulgence, by "promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body" (2:23). But such teaching is empty and even harmful, Paul says, because it doesn't come from Christ. It is the result of someone being "puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind" (2:18) and pretending to have some kind of supernatural knowledge. It only has the "appearance of wisdom."

"What's wrong with you, Colossians?" Paul seems to be asking. He reminds them that when they learned to worship Jesus Christ as the true God, they were freed from the old, oppressive belief that "elemental spirits" ruled their lives and must be placated. Why, he asks, are they now willing to listen to these teachers who ask them to return to the worship of angels? Why do they agree to submit to unnecessary regulations: "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (2:21)?

All the regulations imposed by these teachers are a lot of work. Their followers must know what things to avoid, what things to do regularly, and what are the best ways to keep from being "disqualified" by their teachers. Paul encourages the Colossians to forget all that, because it is the wrong work. He suggests that they do some other things: Hold fast to Christ who is the Head, and seek and set their minds on the things that are above rather than those that are on earth (2: 19, 3:1-2). Yes, these things are also work, but they are the right kind, because they lead to salvation. They are the kind of work that the Archangel Jehudiel can support and assist.

Troparion - Tone 1

Commanders of the heavenly hosts,
we who are unworthy beseech you,
by your prayers encompass us beneath the wings of your
immaterial glory,
and faithfully preserve us who fall down and cry to you:
"Deliver us from all harm, for you are the commanders of
the powers on high!"

People who believe that angels rule the universe are misguided, Paul firmly says. It's true that we cannot understand everything about life or the world, because our "life is hid with Christ in God" (2: 3). But Christ is our life, and when He appears and is manifested in glory, "then you also will appear with Him in glory" (3:4).