

Here's The Point!

Life Lessons from Mother Lynn

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“Raphael”

Originally delivered Feast of St. Michael & All Angels, September 28, 2008
(Scripture - The Book of Tobit)

One of the first books I read on my sabbatical was a deeply spiritual novel called Miss Garnet's Angel. It's about a British school teacher and spinster who describes herself as an atheist and a communist. She retires, takes a six month sojourn in Venice and is transformed by the city, its beauty and its people. Most importantly - she is *transformed by her gradual involvement with the Archangel Raphael*.

The Archangel Raphael, along with Michael, Gabriel and others, is the subject of today's Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. While I'm only one quarter British and no spinster, in a moment I'll tell you my own stories about St. Raphael - whose name means “*God's healing*.” (Raphael and the angels lead us to God, who alone heals us.)

If you want the *biblical* story of Raphael, read the apocryphal book of Tobit, which is located in The Jerusalem Bible. The story, written by the Jews in Egypt around the 5th century BC, is about the faith and healing of a pious man named Tobit, *who suddenly becomes blind*. His blindness causes Tobit's life to fall apart. Later, his life comes together through the ministry of the angel Raphael. When Tobit finally realizes that it's Raphael, disguised in human form, who has been healing and guiding him all along - he falls down terrified.

Raphael instructs Tobit: “*Don't be afraid. I was with you by God's will. It's God you need to praise and thank. Peace be with you.*”

Both Tobit, who's stricken with blindness after an exemplary life of almsgiving and acts of mercy, and Miss Garnet, whose life has been loveless and sterile, ask: “What does my life really amount to?”

It's a great question. What does *your* life amount to? What does *mine*?

Well, the answer I found had much to do with wings! Not chicken wings, but *angel wings*, which I had to paint in the icon course I took at Yale on my sabbatical.

One of my sabbatical discoveries was: *it's really hard to paint angel wings*. In order to do them justice you have to pay attention to the old masters. Like painting angel wings, in order to figure out what your life really amounts to, you have to learn how to really *look* and *pay attention*. If you do, *you'll experience God's presence in the people He sends to minister to you and for you to minister to.*

Our life's purpose, as Blessed Mother Teresa teaches us, is to do something beautiful for God. Therefore, our lives amount to the sum of lives we've touched.

Here's the point: *the holy angels lead us into the light of Christ. The amount of heavenly light we absorb and reflect by loving others is what matters. In fact, it's all that matters. Our lives amount to the sum of lives WE'VE touched.*

Let me sum this up: icons are all about light. Our icon professor reminded us that our goal is to *hold and reflect* the Divine light of God, who is *all* light. Meaning our soul has two functions: to *contain* the Divine light and to *reflect* it.

As an object lesson, he took a huge plastic replica of a diamond and held it up to the sun. When the diamond was in line with the sun and filled with the sun's light, its rays refracted brilliantly all over the room. Its light reflected in the corners, on the floor - everywhere. Like diamonds, we only reflect light to the extent that we absorb it.

But there's more: our professor pointed out that the Light of the World, Jesus, became resplendent by being sacrificed for you and me. Remember: *a diamond is only brilliant when it's cut.* Before that, it's just a dull stone. Therefore, we need God to remove those parts of our soul that won't reflect the light or we're just dull stones!!

How it works is: our souls need *radical surgery.* We need the *fire* of the Holy Spirit to remove those things that stop us from *absorbing* and *reflecting* God's grace. Part of the angels' job description is to *lead us into the healing light of Christ's Spirit.*

Here's the good news: once Miss Garnet let the angel Raphael lead her to Christ, she confronted long-suppressed abuse by her father *and its effects were removed.* Then she was able to *absorb* and *reflect* love.

Similarly, once Tobit let go of his fear - through the ministry of Raphael - *his blindness was healed by Christ.* Then Tobit became a bright diamond *seeing* and *reflecting* God's glory. Miss Garnet's healing came as she opened herself to the light of Christ through His intermediary, the angel Raphael. Tobit saw only after he courageously allowed his son to minister to him as instructed by the angel Raphael.

So -- let the Holy Angels lead you into Christ's light. Then *absorb* and *reflect* it to others. Let Raphael and the angels lead you into the land that is beyond the region of thunder -- always peaceful -- always serene -- and bright with the resplendent glory of God.
Amen.