

You may have seen those sweet looking little angel lapel badges on sale; among other places, I've even seen them in the gift shop in York Minster, and Tewkesbury Abbey. However, they're nothing to do with the Angels of God we encounter in Scripture.

They're actually part of the New Age Movement, and come from the occult practices of Reiki healing, and Spiritualism: neither of which, in my opinion, and that of the Church, should have any place in our lives as followers of Jesus. See: CCC; 2116 & 2117

In the readings for today's Eucharist, Angels figure quite prominently.

For instance, in the Gospel, Mark says that Jesus was tempted by Satan: But, the: "Angels [of God] took care of him." Mk. 1: 13

Satan – the Fallen Angel par excellence – who, as Jesus tells us, fell: "From heaven like lightning!" Lk. 11: 15

In his First Letter, Peter says that Jesus, having entered Heaven, is: "Seated in the place of honour next to God, and all the Angels, and Dominations and Powers accept his authority." 1 Pt. 3: 22

Dominations and Powers are titles for Angels, which are often used in Scripture; particularly the New Testament.

But Angels appear again in Peter's Letter in that strange verse: "In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life, and, in the spirit, he went to preach to the spirits in prison." 1 Pt.3: 18 – 19

In another place, Peter explains what he means by this. He says: "God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment." 2 Pt. 2: 4

But, over time, that Scriptural interpretation of the 'spirits in prison' was lost; only to be replaced by the idea that Jesus went to preach to the souls in Limbo.

But the first Christians had no concept of Limbo; it didn't figure in their theology at all.

It only became a theological theory – with the emphasis on the word theory – in the Middle Ages.

And Pope Benedict has this to say about Limbo: "Limbo was never a defined truth of faith. Personally, I would abandon it, since it was only a theological hypothesis." Pope Benedict XVI: The Ratzinger Report; 1985

As the Church has reflected more deeply on this Scripture passage, she has rightly concluded that the 'spirits in prison' were the fallen angels, the followers of Satan, bound in the: "The chains of deepest darkness."

Jesus was victorious over evil, not in spite of His death, but precisely in His death.

For, at that moment, lowered into the 'deepest darkness,' Jesus descended to show the fallen angels that He was the victorious Saviour of the world.

Love had conquered hate. Life had conquered death.

Now, I know talk of Satan, Heaven and Hell isn't popular these days – even in the Church – but we're dealing with spiritual realities, not the stuff of fairy-tales.

And these are spiritual realities that are far more real, and have a profounder effect on our lives, than material realities.

Many people don't think twice about believing in lapel angels, Spiritualism, and the like; but think that those of us who believe Jesus died, and rose to new life for us, to have lost our grip on reality.

Today we've listened to part of the opening chapter of Mark's Gospel.

St. Irenaeus, a Second-century Bishop, and theologian, used the symbolism of a lion for

Mark's Gospel.

Maybe it's because Mark's Gospel shows Jesus to be like a lion stalking its prey.

But Jesus is: "Not like a tame lion." caged up in a zoo. C.S. Lewis: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Ch. 17

Throughout His life, like a lion, Jesus stalked Satan and, on the Cross, defeated him.

That stalking begins in today's Gospel when the Spirit drives Jesus to go out into the wilderness where He's tempted by Satan.

In Lent we're called to go into the wilderness with Jesus.

But not to retreat into a nice, cosy religious huddle where we give up chocolate, and think we've done our bit.

With Jesus we're in a battle against the forces of Evil, which roam the world bent on our destruction.

As Psalm 22 says, which Jesus prayed aloud on the Cross, and begins: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me." "Like lions they open their jaws against me, roaring and tearing into their prey." Ps. 22: 1 & 13

But, through His Death and Resurrection, Jesus is in fact: "The Lion of the tribe of Judah [who] has won the victory [over the power of evil]." Rev. 5: 5

We too have the victory in Christ over the forces of evil in this world; but only if we're shielded by: "The precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God." 1 Peter 1: 18

Jesus said: "The time promised by God has come at last! The Kingdom of God is near!"

Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" Mk. 1: 15

As we journey together through the wilderness of Lent,

may we take to our hearts those words of the Lord so that we can reach the goal of wholeheartedly renewing our commitment to Him at the Easter Triduum.