

Forgotten Homily of St. John Vianney

****FEAST OF THE HOLY GUARDIAN ANGELS****

Angeli eorum in cœlis semper vident faciem Patris mei, qui in cœlis est.

The angels of these little children continually see the face of my heavenly Father. (S. Matth., xviii, 10.)

Such goodness, my brethren, such tenderness on the part of our God! Not content with having given us His only Son, the most tender object of His delight, to sacrifice Him to the most cruel death; not content with having rescued us from the tyranny of the devil, with having called us to the glorious quality of children of God and with having chosen us as co-heirs of His kingdom, He also wants to send to each of us an angel from heaven to guard us all the days of our life.

This angel must not leave us before having appeared with us at the tribunal of Jesus Christ, to give Him an account of all that we have done during our life.

Yes, my brethren, our guardian angels are our most faithful friends, because they are with us day, night, at all times and in all places. Faith teaches us that we have them always by our side.

This is what makes David say: "That nothing can harm us, because the Lord has commanded His angels to take care of us"; and, to show how great is the care they take of us, the prophet says that they carry us in their hands, as a mother carries her child.

Ah! God foresaw the countless dangers to which we would be exposed on earth, in the midst of so many enemies, all of whom seek only our destruction.

Yes, my brethren, it is our good angels who console us in our sorrows, who warn us when the devil comes to tempt us, who present our prayers and all our good deeds to God, who assist us at death and present our souls to their sovereign Judge.

Oh! My brethren, what good things we receive through the ministry of our good guardian angels.

In order to encourage you to have great confidence in them, I will show you:

1° how great is the care they take of us;

2° what we must do to show them our gratitude.

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Wanting to prove, my brethren, that there are angels would be a waste of time. Since the beginning of the world, the commerce of angels with men has been so frequent that Holy Scripture makes mention of it at all times. You would have to not have a single good sound to doubt it.

When Adam was in the earthly paradise, the Heavenly Father sent His angels to him to inform him of His wishes. When Adam had the misfortune of sinning, it was an angel who chased him out of paradise. Almost all the patriarchs and prophets were instructed by angels about the will of the Lord. Often we even see that God has made Himself represented by angels.

But, you will tell me, if we saw them, we would have much more confidence? — If it had been necessary for the salvation of our soul, the good God would have made them visible. But that matters little; for in our religion we only know by faith, so that all our actions may be more meritorious. Besides, we are as sure of their presence as if we saw them with our own eyes.

If you wish to know the number of angels, their function, I will tell you that they are without number: some are created to honor Jesus Christ in His hidden, suffering and glorious life, or to be the guardians of men, without ceasing, for this reason, to enjoy the divine presence. The others occupy themselves in contemplating the perfections of God, or else watch over our preservation, by providing us with all the means necessary for our sanctification.

Although the good God is sufficient in Himself, He nevertheless uses the ministry of His angels to govern the world. Some are established as protectors of kingdoms, others of empires, etc.

If we see God taking so much care of our life, we must conclude that our soul is something very great and very precious, so that He uses for its preservation and sanctification all that is greatest in His court.

He gave us His Son to save us. This Son Himself gives His body and His blood to make them the food of our souls. He agrees to remain night and day in our midst. He gives

each of us one and even several angels, who are solely concerned with asking Him for us the graces and help necessary for our salvation.

Isn't it true, my brethren, that we have never really thought about what we are, what our soul is worth? Oh! that man knows for what he is, and the end for which he was created!

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We read in Holy Scripture that the Lord said to His people: "I will send you My angel, that he may guide you in all your steps."

Oh! My brethren, who could count the graces that we receive through the protection of our guardian angels!

Yes, they are the ones who console us in our sorrows. When Hagar, says the Scripture, was driven from her master's house, she withdrew into a desert, and there, as she gave way to sadness, the Lord sent her an angel to comfort her and say to her: "Do not give way to despair, but return to your master's house, and be more submissive."

It was an angel that the Lord sent to Lot to tell him to leave the city of Sodom quickly, before the Lord caused fire to fall there from heaven. It was the angels who preserved the three children in the furnace of Babylon from the flames, and who closed the mouths of the lions to prevent them from devouring the prophet Daniel.

The angels, my brethren, take great pleasure in assisting us in our undertakings, when they are according to God; we have a good example of this in the person of young Tobias.

His father sent him to Rages to get his money; not knowing the way, the good God sent him the angel Raphael, who presented himself to him in the form of a young man. Tobias asked him if he knew the way to Rages. The angel told him that he knew it and even the uncle he was going to. The young man, very happy, went to tell his father that he had found a man who knew the way to Rages and who knew his uncle. So the angel left with Tobias, and gave him all the information necessary for his journey.

During their journey, Tobias having gone to the bank of the Tigris, a huge fish seemed to come towards him to devour him; he immediately had recourse to his protector, not knowing that he was an angel. He said to him: "Fear nothing, pull him to you." Instantly the fish died. He said to him again: "Take the gall to carry it away; you will rub it into your father's eyes and thus restore his sight." He took him to his uncle, where everything went well. He saved his life again by chaining the demon.

When they returned, young Tobias, not knowing how to pay so many benefits, said to his father: “My father, if we gave half of everything we brought, it would not be enough to reward him for all the services he rendered me on my journey: he led me and brought me back safe and sound, he delivered me from a monster who was going to devour me, he himself obtained the money that my uncle owed us, he also made me marry a woman after God’s own heart, he finally stopped the devil from destroying me, as he did the seven husbands who married her before me.”

The father wanted him to accept half of everything they had brought; the angel made himself known and disappeared. But to show their gratitude to God, they prostrated themselves with their faces to the ground for a long time.

Do you see, my brethren, how much the angels take care of us, when we trust in them?...

We see yet another beautiful example of this protection of our good guardian angel, in the person of Saint Agnes, virgin and martyr. She belonged to a great family in Rome, so she was asked to marry by Procopius, son of Symphronius, then prefect of this city.

Agnes, who had already given herself to Jesus Christ, refused this, although advantageous for her. She did not fear to say to Procopius, who had come to find her himself: “Begone, tyrant, sting of sin, stone of scandal, and flesh of death, do not believe that I am unfaithful to my husband Jesus Christ. He has my whole heart, He is good, He is beautiful, He has all the qualities one could desire.”

The prefect called her, and implored her not to reject her son’s alliance; or else, upon her refusal, he would have her dragged to an infamous place, where she would lose the purity she was so keen to preserve.

Agnes replied to the prefect: “Don’t worry, I fear nothing; I have to protect me an angel who will take good care of me, and who will defend me in a marvelous way.”

Seeing that he could not achieve his goals, the magistrate gave orders to strip her of her clothes, and to drag her throughout Rome, to be delivered to libertines. By a miracle of God’s power, her hair grew so wonderfully that it was enough to cover all her limbs.

Arriving in this infamous place, her guardian angel visibly appeared to defend her and clothe her in a dress white as snow; at the same time, this den of impurity was illuminated with a light more brilliant than the sun. The libertines entered this dungeon;

but, surprised by all these wonders, and struck with terror by the sight of this angel of incomparable beauty, they all converted.

Procopius thought he was coming in his turn to defy all these prodigies, but the angel who guarded Agnes struck him, and he fell dead at the saint's feet. The prefect of the city, hearing that his son had just died in this dungeon, came to find Agnes, calling her a "fury from hell, a monster born for the destruction of mortals." Agnes said that she had not caused Procopius to die, but that he himself was the author of his death by his effrontery. Also his guardian angel had struck him at the moment when this unfortunate man was going to take away her purity.

However, the saint wanting to show the magistrate the power of her husband, and that the Christians knew how to return good for evil, resurrected Procopius, who ran throughout the city of Rome, constantly repeating that the God of the Christians was the only true God...

This example proves to you how great are the help and graces that we receive from our good guardian angels, if we have the good fortune to have great confidence in them, especially in our temptations and in perils.

But, you will ask me, when does the good God send us our guardian angels from heaven?

It is, my brethren, when our souls are created, that is to say when our bodies are in the position to receive them, so that a pregnant mother has her guardian angel, and she also has that of the child she carries in her womb to ensure that nothing can take her life before having received holy Baptism.

We should, my brethren, be able to understand how great the joy of our good guardian angels is, when we are taken to church to receive this sacrament. They eagerly write our name in the book of life!

It is very certain that we have many demons around us to make us fall into sin; and, if our guardian angel were not there with us to defend us, we would succumb to all the attacks that the demon delivers to us.

It is our good angel who makes us see temptation; it is he who inspires us to have recourse to God, who makes us remember His presence to make us fear sin.

If we have the misfortune of sinning, it is our good guardian angels who will throw themselves at the feet of the good God to ask Him for our grace. Indeed, after each sin, we usually feel remorse for having done evil, and we promise the good God not to do it again. It is surely our guardian angel who, through his prayers, deserves this grace for us.

If he sees that we are insensitive to the outrages we have done to God, he threatens us with the punishments of divine justice; he makes us think of death, of the regret we will have, at that moment, for having done evil. He makes us think of some sudden or frightening death. The thought of judgment will pursue us, and that of hell will lodge itself in our heart to tear our souls, and thus, in some way, force us not to remain in sin any longer.

Our guardian angels, my brethren, accompany us everywhere.

It is reported in the story that a young man saw, in a sensible way, his guardian angel. When he entered the church, his angel always entered before him; when he was a priest, his angel no longer wanted to go first; he was sometimes seen talking and remaining at the door for a long time. We asked him why. "Before I was a priest," he said, "my angel always preceded me; now he no longer wants to enter until I enter first."

Ah! My brethren, if we had the thought, when we come to church, that our angels walk before us, with what respect would we not come! ... with what modesty we would attend holy Mass, thinking that we are next to a guardian angel prostrated before the God of all greatness? With what eagerness would we not charge him to present our prayers to Jesus Christ?

It is also reported that a young English prince abandoned his palace to retire into a desert. God, to increase his joy, gave him the happiness of seeing his guardian angel every morning and every evening.

It is said of Saint Frances that she continually saw her guardian angel, in the form of a child of incomparable beauty, and whose face was so resplendent that she often read her office during the night in the clarity of the light it shed. Her angel took so much care to lead her to perfection that if, at times, she indulged in useless thoughts in her solitude, or if some idle word escaped her in conversation, this good angel would make her aware of her fault by disappearing. Then, filled with confusion and pain at having herself distanced her faithful guardian, she wept bitterly, praying to the good God to have pity on her, and promising Him that she would correct herself. After a few

moments of tears, she saw her guardian angel reappear, to whom she expressed her pain at having forced him to move away.

If, sometimes, those who were with the saint said something to her that could hurt charity even a little, she showed the pain she felt by covering her face with her hands.

My brethren, although we do not see, like this saint, our guardian angel, we are no less sure of having him near us to watch over the preservation of our soul.

Alas! with what tortures and bitterness must we not inflict it, by leading such a miserable life? What must the guardian angel think of a person who does neither Easter nor confession? of an elderly person who continually rolls around in the sin of impurity?

Ah! my God, if they were capable of suffering, would they not be as miserable as the reprobate who burn in hell? How can the angels, who are so pure, remain near these infamous people? Can our charitable angels stay with the vindictive and resentful? Can the angels, so humble, accompany the proud? How can an angel, who loves the good God so much, be happy with an impious person, an unbeliever who denies everything, who believes in nothing?

Is it really possible that we are so bad, so ungrateful, towards such beneficent friends, so faithful in not leaving us for a single moment?...

We know that our guardian angels take great care to console us in our pains and sufferings.

We read in Holy Scripture that Jacob, fleeing from the fury of his brother, fell asleep on the way. The good Lord, to console him, showed him in a vision a ladder, which rose from the earth to heaven; he saw the angels ascending and descending to offer our prayers to God and bring back the graces we ask.

The angel who had led and brought back the young Tobias, having made himself known, said to his father: "When you prayed and buried the dead, it was I myself who brought your good deeds to the Lord."

It is said in the life of Saint Nicholas of Tolentino that, during the two months of his illness, four angels stayed in his room all night. They sang a melody so pleasant that he forgot his suffering. The last six days before his death they remained day and night; all those who had the pleasure of entering the room also had the pleasure of hearing their songs. The angels took his soul with them into heaven.

Saint Lidwina suffering from very violent pains, an angel appeared to her in such great beauty that she forgot her sufferings.

We can say that the angels delight in rendering us all the services of which they are capable, and that they are very keen to have us participate in their happiness. Through them, heaven carries out holy commerce with earth.

God often employed the ministry of holy angels in the most important events. It was through them that He instructed the patriarchs and the prophets, through them that He spoke to His people.

We read in Holy Scripture that the Lord sent His angel to speak to the Israelites in His name: "I took you out of Egypt and brought you into the Promised Land, promising you that I would never abandon you, but on condition that you would be faithful to me. You didn't want to hear my voice, why did you behave this way? It is because of your infidelity and the contempt you made of my graces that I did not defend you against your enemies." The Israelites, hearing these words of the angel, began to cry out lamentably, and shed abundant tears, begging him to have pity on them and not to abandon them.

We see that all men who were great on earth were announced by angels. It was an angel who announced the birth of Samson, the avenger of God's people. It was an angel who announced the conception of Saint John. It was an angel who announced the conception of the Savior, it was an angel who announced His birth to the shepherds, it was an angel who told Joseph to flee to Egypt. It was another angel who consoled Jesus in His agony in the Garden of Olives, it was the angels who buried and accompanied the body of the Blessed Virgin after her death. They will be angels who will accompany the Lord to His last judgment.

"According to this, my brethren, if each of them must be honored according to their dignity," Saint Bernard tells us, "what honor and what praise should we not give to our guardian angels, whose nature is so perfect, whose holiness is so eminent, whose glory is so dazzling?"

But what should lead us above all to great veneration towards them is their inviolable fidelity to the good God. Their innocence has never been sullied by the slightest stain, their love and their zeal have never suffered the slightest alteration.

If we truly loved the good God, my brethren, what joy would we not have at what He receives from these blessed spirits, such perfect praise? Alas, how imperfect are the praises of those who, even among us, love Him most! How many distractions in our conversations with God!

For the angels, on the contrary, nothing is capable of distracting them from the presence of God, so absorbed are they in the contemplation of His greatness. They continually make the vault of heaven resound with this song of joy: "Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord, the God of hosts; May honor, glory and adoration be returned to Him, for ever and ever!"

I say that our guardian angels are very exact in helping us in our troubles.

We read in the Acts of the holy Apostles the following trait. Saint Peter having been put in prison by the order of Herod, he fell asleep between the two soldiers who guarded him at night; it was the day before the day on which he was to be put to death. An angel suddenly appears to him, awakens him, breaks his chains and opens the doors of the prison, saying to him: "Rise quickly... and follow me." Being guided by the angel, he left his prison and knocked at the door of the house where the disciples were gathered. A servant having heard Peter's voice, unable to contain her joy, ran without opening the door to announce that Peter was there. We didn't want to believe it; some treated it as foolish, the others said it was an angel. And Peter having entered, told all his brothers what his guardian angel had done to deliver him.

We see that God often sent His angels to help the martyrs. Thus, it was the angels who brought the crowns to the forty martyrs of Sebaste, which caused the very one who kept them to convert at the sight of this prodigy.

The holy King David, who knew how pleasing their praises are to the Lord, invited the angels to praise and bless Him, saying to them: "Bless the Lord, all you who are ministers of His will."

Let us follow, my brethren, the example of this holy king; let us often pray to the angels to praise and adore God for us; let us ask them to take our place with Him, to thank Him for all the graces He has given us during our lives. Let us ask them to pray to the good God to change our hearts, and to make them heavenly hearts.

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To deserve this happiness which is the protection of our guardian angels, we must often invoke them, respect them well and, above all, try to imitate them in all our actions.

The first thing we must imitate in them is the thought of the presence of God; following their example, let us never lose it.

Ah! My brethren, if we had this happiness, how many fewer sins! Indeed, if we were truly penetrated by the presence of God, how could we do evil? Oh! that our virtues and all our good works would be much more pleasing to God! We would have no more human respect, no more human views.

If we always remembered the presence of God, how would we have the courage to remain in sin, seeing how much suffering we cause Jesus Christ? How could we wish harm to our neighbor, thinking that the good God, whose goodness is infinite, considers, reads and listens to all the movements of our heart?

Also, wanting to elevate the patriarch Abraham to high perfection, God said to him: "Abraham, do you want to be perfect? Walk in my presence."

How can it be that we forget so easily the good God, while we always have Him before us? Why are we not filled with respect and gratitude towards our angels, who accompany us day and night? Of the princes of the celestial court... oh my God, how happy we are!... but also, how far we are from understanding it!

"I'm too miserable," you might say, "to deserve that!" Not only does God not lose sight of you for an instant, my brethren, but He gives you an angel who never ceases to guide your steps. Oh! happiness too great, but too little known to men!

We must also imitate their love for God. They have His glory so much at heart that when we have the misfortune of sinning, they would throw us into the depths of hell if God did not forbid them from punishing us. [Example of Heliodorus beaten by the angels. (Note from the Venerable.)] They would rather be thrown with the damned than displease God in the slightest thing.

Also, Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that they feel immense joy when a sinner is converted. If therefore the conversion of a sinner rejoices the entire heavenly court, what joy, my brethren, for these ministers of peace, when they see reigning among us this charity which unites them so closely to God in heaven.

It is true that we must have great devotion towards all the angels, because they are all concerned with our salvation; but we must have a special devotion to our holy guardian

angels, because of the great care they take of us and the great desire they have to lead us to heaven.

They cannot leave us alone for a moment, for fear that the demon will deceive us.

Oh! what happiness and what consolation, when we go to bed, to know, by faith, that our good guardian angel watches over our preservation during the night, and that he will spend the entire night praying for us! What a joy to know that when we leave home, we are never alone on the road.

The elders were so imbued with the presence of the guardian angel that they never greeted a person without also greeting their good angel; and this is where this old habit of saying to a person, even if alone, comes from: "I greet you and the company." What is this company, if not that of the good guardian angel? But we say it without thinking about it...

Our guardian angels never abandon us; we must be docile to the advice they give us.

A solitary man had taken his penances to such a high degree of rigor that he could no longer stand on his feet. As the water he was going to fetch was very far away, he said to himself: "Since I am having so much trouble fetching my water, I am going to move my cell closer to the fountain." While his mind was occupied with this, he heard a voice saying, "One, two and three," like a person counting something. Astonished at this language, he turns and sees his guardian angel counting his steps, telling him that the Lord had ordered him to do so, and that none was lost. The saint seeing that this was pleasing to God, far from approaching his cell, removed it further, so as to deserve more.

Alas! how miserable we are not to do everything we do for the good God! That we would win for heaven and that we would please our guardian angel! How rich we would find ourselves at the hour of death!

Alas! My brethren, how many times our sins have forced our good angels to move away from us, that is to say, to abandon us to our enemies, who are the demons and our passions!

Another grace that we receive from them is when, finding us in sin, they never cease to give us remorse, and, as they are continually with the good God, they beg Him not to let us die in this state. They take opportunities away from us, and take all kinds of means to bring us into grace. They console us in our sorrows, our persecutions.

We have a beautiful example of this in the story of Saint Victor. His good guardian angel appeared to him visibly to encourage him to suffer martyrdom, by showing him the greatness of the glory which was prepared for him in heaven, and how much he made himself pleasing to God. So we see few martyrs who suffered with such courage and joy.

This great saint was a soldier and lived in the time of Diocletian and Maximian. These two emperors published the edict that all those who did not worship idols would die in the most cruel tortures. Seeing that several Christians were beginning to falter, Victor went from prison to prison, where several were already confined, in order to inflame them with the desire for martyrdom; he even accompanied them to the place of their torture. His words had so much force and grace that the martyrs seemed to suffer nothing, provided that soldier Victor was at their side. He said to them: "Courage, my friends, heaven awaits you. See Jesus Christ who extends His hand to you; despise life which lasts so short; lift up your hearts to heaven, and Jesus Christ will give you the strength to fight and overcome."

The Emperor Maximian, guided by hatred of the Christian name, summons Victor and orders him to be tied to an untamed horse, which drags him throughout the city; then he had him beaten with rods, so that the body of the saint was nothing more than a scrap of flesh. In the midst of these torments, he prayed to God to support him with His grace. Jesus Christ, touched by his sufferings, appeared to him with His cross: "Courage, Victor," He said to him, "I am Jesus Christ, I am your refuge, fear nothing; I will be with you until the end, take courage."

Some time later, his guardian angel appeared to him in his prison, removed his chains, and consoled him by making him taste in advance the sweets that the Lord was preparing for him in heaven. Then he said to him: "Come out of the prison and show yourself to the emperor, that he may see how the Lord cares for those who serve him." He did indeed go out. The tyrant, surprised to see him again, asked him who had delivered him: "It was Jesus Christ," he said, "who broke my chains, through the ministry of His angels."

More furious than ever, Maximian has Victor taken back to his prison. But the same angel appeared again, and filled the prison with such a bright light, that all the prisoners who were there urgently asked for holy Baptism. The emperor, informed of all these miracles, had Victor crushed by an enormous millstone. Then his angel led his soul in triumph into heaven, where God awaited to reward him.

Why then, my brethren, do we have so little courage in our temptations, in persecutions? Ah! that's because we count only on ourselves, and that we do not have recourse to our guardian angels, who would ask the good God for grace to make us victorious in our battles.

I say that we must unite with our guardian angels when we pray, because they are so pleasing to God that Jesus Christ cannot refuse them anything. We are sure that they are next to us when we pray, and especially when we hear Holy Mass.

A disciple of Saint John Chrysostom tells us that, many times, while he was serving him Mass, he saw the house of God filled with a multitude of angels; some were prostrated before the adorable Body already present on the altar, and others went into the church to inspire in the faithful the respect and love they should have for Jesus Christ.

The deacon Peter reports the following from Saint Gregory: "One day, during the holy Mass, when the celebrant said these words: **Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum**: May the peace of the Lord be always with you, the angels were heard saying in a resounding voice, so as to be heard by all present: **Et cum Spiritu tuo**: And with your Spirit." This is why, since that time, when the Sovereign Pontiff celebrates in public, no one responds: **Et cum Spiritu tuo**, in order to preserve the memory of this miracle.

Our guardian angels will not fail to mark all our good deeds in the book of life, to present them to God at the moment when we are judged. It is they who are the depositaries of all the good that we have done during the course of our lives; it is they who will inspire us, in the terrible moment of death, with great confidence, and who will give us the happiness of receiving the last sacraments. It is our angels who express great regret to the good God for our sins.

Let us say everything, my brethren, in two words: they are our good guardian angels, who, after having kept us company throughout our lives, after having used all possible means, either to bring us out of sin, or to make us persevere in grace, take our souls in triumph into heaven.

If you doubt this, listen to Jesus Christ tell you that the angels took the soul of Lazarus into the bosom of Abraham, which is heaven. Saint Anthony tells us that he saw the soul of Saint Paul, a hermit, led into heaven by the angels.

Alas! My brethren, who among us can sufficiently deplore the misfortune of these Christians who do not know if they have a guardian angel; or who, perhaps, will spend a

considerable time without thanking the good God for the graces He grants them through the protection of their guardian angel, without saying a Pater and an Ave in his honor.

Ah, let us not be surprised to have so little zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of our souls; it is that our guardian angel, as punishment for our ingratitude, abandons us to ourselves. So we do much harm and little good.

Alas! How many Christians are damned for having despised their guardian angels! What reproaches at the hour of death, when, imploring his help, he will say to us, as well as to this dying man of whom the story speaks: "Go, unhappy one, you have had nothing but contempt for me, so the good God has commanded me to abandon you to the power of the demons, of whom you have been the faithful servant." Alas, my God, how the number of these people has grown...

See, my brethren, how much the Church is keen that we have great devotion to the angels. In October, each year, she celebrates a festival in honor of the holy angels, and in particular the holy guardian angels.

There is still a pious practice, which is to dedicate Tuesdays in honor of the holy guardian angels.

How, my brethren, can we forget these protective angels, who are always next to us, and who never leave us for a single moment?

Let us try to thank the good God often for this grace, and to often have recourse to them in our sorrows, in our illnesses, in our sorrows and afflictions. They are our best friends, they love us, and never leave us until they have led us into heaven.

Let us try from time to time to say some prayers, an alms, to have a Mass said in their honor; let fathers and mothers especially do this, to attract the protection of angels to their children, their servants.

Oh! if they are faithful to it, they will soon see peace reign in their family, union between all the members, but above all religion, which will make them happy in this world, while waiting for them to be happy in the other.

It is happiness that I wish you.