

Homily on the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, Co-Patron of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, delivered by Father Karl Lenhardt, Rector of St. Francis de Sales Oratory of St. Louis, at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis on March 7th, 2007.

In sollemnitate S. Thomae Aquinatis, Patroni Instituti Christi Regis Smi. Sacerdotis; Die VII., m. Martii, A.D. MMVII; Basilica Cathedrali S. Ludovici

Your Excellency., Very Reverend and Reverend Monsignors, Very Reverend and Reverend Confreres, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

At first I would like to express on behalf of our Institute, the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, and in the name of our superiors how grateful we are for this occasion to celebrate the feast of one of our main patrons, St. Thomas Aquinas, here at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis. We thank His Grace, the Most Rev. Raymond L. Burke, Archbishop of St. Louis, for his permission to celebrate this mass tonight in his cathedral. As many of you may know, the celebration of this feast is a kind of anticipation of the things to come, of the ordination to the priesthood of two members of our Institute this summer, on June 15, the feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus at this cathedral by the archbishop. Therefore it is also with great joy that we celebrate this mass tonight in the intention of our archbishop and as an act of thanksgiving for all the good we have experienced here in St. Louis since Archbishop Burke has invited our institute to come and to work in this archdiocese.

I also would like to thank wholeheartedly the Very Rev. Msgr. Joseph Pins, Rector of this Cathedral Basilica, for his kind permission to celebrate this mass, for his support of our work and for his spiritual friendship. We also express our profound gratitude to Fr. Thomas Keller, Professor of Liturgy at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary and Master of Ceremonies at the Cathedral Basilica, for his generous and faithful help and support of our work. I also would like to greet our brother priests, deacons, seminarians and religious who have come to be a part of this mass with us.

I am very happy to extend the expression of our profound gratitude and esteem also to Dr. John Romeri, Music Director of the Cathedral Basilica and to the members of the choir for the truly harmonious and very interesting and enriching cooperation.

In music a triad is an accord of three notes; it expresses a special order of tones. The triad is the base of music. We could even say: all harmonies are based on triads. But triads are not only a musical reality. Even the highest harmony we can imagine is a kind of a triad: The Most Holy Trinity. The three persons of the most Holy Trinity are united in the one divinity; they are in a perfect harmony and in a perfect order. The opposite of the divine harmony is the cacophony of the diabolical Chaos. Also a human family has at least three members and is therefore an image of the perfection, the order and the harmony of God himself.

Also in the life of our spiritual family of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest there is a harmony of three persons, of our three holy patrons: St. Benedict, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Francis de Sales. Therefore it seems to me really providential, that we celebrate this feast day of our Institute with the faithful of St. Francis de Sales Oratory and the parishioners of the Cathedral Basilica in this beautiful building where our patrons are represented in the splendid mosaics that surround us and give us a glimpse of the heavenly splendor!

The three patrons of our Institute give us our spiritual identity. The triad of our patrons fills our life with harmony, represents to us the richness of our catholic faith and the strength of the tradition of the whole church. The Latin word tradition means to hand something down. We can't invent tradition but we receive it. St. Augustin says once: We are gnomes standing on the shoulders of giants. Our holy patrons are the giants. From them we have received the tradition of the church and this tradition goes back to our Lord who handed himself down to the sinners, who sacrificed himself for us. Through the tradition of the church we receive the whole richness and the deeper understanding of the mysteries of our salvation that the church has developed over the centuries under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The personal example of our patrons, their holiness, reflects the example our Lord has given to us. They encourage us to believe that holiness is not only something rare for a few people, but that it is possible for everyone. God wants every one

of us to become a saint, not at first by our own efforts, but by the cooperation with God's grace, through the intercession and the example of our holy patrons.

St. Thomas Aquinas is one of the greatest teachers of the church he is even called Doctor Angelicus, the Angelic Teacher because of his profound insight into the mysteries of our faith. But what is a teacher of the church and what is a teacher?

St. Thomas himself has given an answer to this question. In the 11th Question of the *Questiones disputatae de veritate*, that is probably the fruit of a public debate, St. Thomas treats the question what a teacher is. We could also say that he has written a small work about himself.

The definition of the teacher St. Thomas gives us is very simple: A teacher is someone who causes knowledge in another person by the use of sensible signs. When we think of our own lives, we can immediately agree with St. Thomas. The communication of visible signs, this is the way we were taught throughout our whole life, in the beginning by our parents who taught us our language, our behavior and the most elementary things for our daily life. Then later we were taught by priests, teachers and professors. But this is not all. We also taught and teach each other, from time to time probably, even not always the best things. Knowledge is evidently something invisible, as well as prudence and wisdom, but the way of transmission is by the sensible signs, letters, words, sentences as well as by numbers, formulas, pictures, gestures, movements and so on.

The element of transmission or communication is so important for St. Thomas that he even denies the possibility that a man could teach himself. When we read a book, when we study a language, when we read the newspaper or try to get information on the Internet, we are not alone, we are always in a communicative process with those who have written the book or have prepared the information. No one can be the teacher of himself. Children wouldn't survive without the teaching of their parents and we would be unable to communicate without the teaching of others. How would we think, if we had even no idea of the meaning of words, if we were completely unable to think in terms in which we are also able to express our thoughts? We have learned our language from our parents that gives us the occasion to express our deepest feelings and convictions and not only to repeat what we have heard from them or from others.

Another element of St. Thomas' definition is the sensible sign. We are no angels. We can not communicate with each other in an only intellectual way. We have even to express our deepest feelings and thoughts in a sensible way, if we don't want to remain alone with them. Because of the fact that our soul is the form of our body, our body is in a certain sense the instrument of our soul. We don't and we can not communicate soul to soul, but we need the visible reality of our body to express the deepest convictions of our soul. The visible signs are so important for teaching that St. Thomas even denies that – in the order of nature – an angel would be able to teach us. St. Thomas does not deny that this is possible outside of the order of nature, by a miracle, but not in itself, because an angel is a pure spirit and therefore he is not able to produce sensible signs. On the contrary, angels are able to influence our soul in a more immediate way, because the nature of our soul is closer to their spiritual nature.

Finally, St. Thomas asks the question if a man can really be called a teacher or only God himself. Isn't it God who teaches us the ultimate truth? Isn't it him who reveals what no eye has seen and what no ear has heard? We can easily imagine what the answer of St. Thomas is. Of course, in the noblest sense of the word, only God could be called a teacher. Everything that exists and the whole order of reality have its origin in him. Even our capacity of understanding depends on God. Therefore, when we understand something the inner light of the clarity of our understanding comes from God, but it does not diminish the necessity of the exterior teacher that is man. We are able to understand in an appropriate way the thoughts God has put into creation. We can understand how reality is and how it should be, how we are and how we should be because we are created in the image of God.

But how does God teach, if he wants to teach us? Through visible, through sensible signs! Also God uses sensible signs: The whole order of reality reflects in a sensible way the invisible thoughts of its creator. From the metaphysical order to the moral law, all this is expressed in the visible order of creation, from the existence of water and stones to the existence of human nature. Even the existence of God is an object of our reason because the whole order of visible reality ends in the question of the invisible origin of it in God.

But the best answer to the question how God teaches is given in the life of our Lord. The most astonishing moment of St. Thomas work about the teacher is, that exactly at this point we discover that the

question that seems at first to be about the teacher and in a certain way about St. Thomas himself, teaches us at the end the truth about God and about the way he reveals himself to us.

The highest expression of the method of teaching by sensible signs is evidently the apparition of our Lord himself. He truly is a teacher. The invisible God, the second person of the most Holy Trinity descends into the sensibility and visibility of the human nature. By this he teaches us the truth about the infinite love of the Father who “to redeem a slave has offered his son” (Chant of the Exsultet). He reveals through his apparition the ugliness of sin and shows us the beauty of heaven. He teaches us the truth about the dignity of human nature, our true situation and our redemption by his visible appearance among us. Christ himself says: I have given to you an example. And this example, this visible appearance is not only an event in history. Our Lord is still present in a visible and sensible way, in his mystical body, in the church, in the visible way of the sacraments and in the hierarchical order of the church.

The mystery of incarnation itself follows this order: As our own physical existence hides, but also reveals its invisible source of life, the soul, the visible, the human appearance of Jesus Christ hides, but also reveals at the same time, his divine nature. But Christ does more. He does not only teach us a theoretical truth or gives us a moral example; he does not teach us a truth that exists outside from him, but he reveals himself to us. His human life is the instrument to communicate his divine life to us so that we are able to take part in his life. He shares our human existence to enable us to take part in his divine life. Holy Scripture even calls him: The Sign of the Time. In him the beginning of the end of time has appeared, the fulfillment of this world. As Eternal High Priest, being himself priest, altar and sacrificial offering, Christ has sacrificed his human life to pay the price for our redemption from sin death and the devil. Now “our new life is hidden with Christ in God”. Christ continues to be present and to communicate his invisible grace in a visible, sensible way “in, with and through his church” (as the Catechism of the Catholic Church states in No. 1069), in his mystical body, and in visible and sensible signs, in the sacraments. Our Lord himself works in them. By visible signs we receive the grace that our Lord has linked to them. At first and in the highest way, in the Holy Eucharist that is the sacrament of sacraments because Christ himself is substantially present in it, in his sacrifice and in his easterly victory. Therefore the Eucharist is also the origin and end of all other sacraments, as the last Council and again the Catechism underline. In the visible appearance of bread and wine our Lord gives us his body and blood and with it his divine life; he nourishes our deepest desire. The Holy Eucharist truly is the sacramentum caritatis, as the Holy Father calls it in His Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist that will be published on March 13., the sacrament of God’s love to us that allows us to take part in his love and to reflect it to our neighbor, to illuminate the darkness of this world with the light of God’s love. It also is the center of the church because it transforms us into what itself is, the body of Christ. Therefore, it truly is the sacrament of unity; it truly unites us with the whole church and we could go so far to say that when we receive it, we receive with it the whole church, the pope, our archbishop and all those who have taken part in it before us, with the whole communion of saints.

The visibility of Christ and his grace in the sacraments is extended in the sensible expressions of the liturgical forms. In the visibility of the holy liturgy we experience what the preface of Christmas teaches us: “Ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur: that while we acknowledge him to be God seen by men, we may be drawn by him to the love of things unseen.” The liturgical forms Holy Mother Church has developed over the centuries are like the setting of a precious stone, the sacraments. As they have a created, a human side they are fragile. Without the setting the precious, but small stone could be lost, but with the setting it is even more beautiful and visible. When we truly believe that the Holy Ghost is the communicator of the sacramental grace and that he guides the church, how could we not believe that it is him who also guided the church over the centuries in the organic development of the most fitting setting for the precious stone of the sacramental grace and the presence of our Lord among us? Pope Paul VI. writes in his Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* about the liturgy we celebrate tonight: “Innumerable holy men and women nurtured their spiritual life on its readings from scripture and on its prayer texts.” This liturgy is still alive and it expresses still in a strong way our faith and our catholic identity. It truly is the fons et culmen, the source and focal point of the life of the church, of our life.

It is the sensible sign of an unseen reality that is brought to our mind by our Lord himself. The small treatise St. Thomas has written about the teacher is not at first a work about himself, but it became for us an introduction into the mysteries of our salvation by the incarnation of the Son of the Eternal Father and the

sacramental life of the church. St. Thomas is that great teacher of the church because he hasn't taught anything else but this truth he had received from our Lord through the church.

The teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas gives us a great optimism and hope because at first he teaches us a realistic approach of this world in which we are not lost, but that is accessible and understandable for us. Then he reveals to us the beauty, harmony and integrity of our faith that is not opposed to the order God has given to his creation, but its highest perfection. His teaching was so faithful to what he had received that in many cases it truly became the teaching of the church. The Council of Trent even quotes his definition of the sacrament.

St. Thomas is, although he has had the deepest thoughts about the truth of our faith, the best example of a holy and humble teacher. No one has ever taught about the Blessed Sacrament in the way St. Thomas did, not only in his manuals, but at the same time in the prayers and hymns of the Feast day of Corpus Christi which he has written. At the end of his life, after he had seen in a vision the glory and beauty of God, he esteemed all his intellectual works to be straw in comparison to what he had seen. We can be glad that the teaching of St. Thomas has preserved the church and is still preserving it from the worst errors and helps us to discover more and more the richness and the beauty that God has prepared for those who love him. Also our Lord agrees with this because in the same vision of St. Thomas he told him: "Bene scripsisti de me, Thoma – You have well written about me, Thomas." In this celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of our Redeemer let us answer with St. Thomas:

Jesus, whom now veiled I by faith descry,
What my soul doth thirst for, do not, Lord, deny:
That Thy Face unveiled I at last may see,
With the blissful vision blest, my God, of Thee.

Iesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
Oro, fiat illud, quod tam sitio:
Ut, te revelata cernens facie,
Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae.
Amen.