Celebrating the New Year with the Mother of God
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LUMEN CHRISTI
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST THE LIGHT

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Editor, Lumen Christi
FROM THE RECTOR

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! I pray that 2020 will be filled with abundant graces for you and your loved ones.

I write this letter during the second week of Advent 2019, having celebrated two great Marian Feast Days: the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Similarly, I am mindful that the Church celebrates the first day of 2020 with the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God. Having witnessed the tremendous devotion of the faithful to the Blessed Mother here at the Cathedral, I thought I would take a moment to reflect upon the importance of having a true devotion to Our Lady and that such a devotion can keep us spiritually grounded in this new year.

When I was a seminarian in Rome, the faculty of my seminary made it a top priority to help us deepen our love for Mary. In fact, we had a very interesting custom in our seminary that was inspired by an incident in the life of Pope Pius IX in 1855.

The story goes like this. One day while the Holy Father was greeting assembled guests in a convent adjacent to the Basilica of St. Agnes on the Via Nomentana in Rome, the main beam supporting the floor gave way. With a loud crash, the floor caved in, and the Holy Father and several guests fell twenty feet into the cellar below. Despite the dangerous fall, Blessed Pope Pius IX and those present were unharmed by the catastrophe. The Holy Father attributed their safety to Mary, as he cried out during the traumatic event “Vergine Immacolata, aiutaci!” (Immaculate Virgin, help us!).

Consequently, my seminary adopted the practice of calling upon the help of the Blessed Mother by praying the same words, “Vergine Immacolata, aiutaci!” We would say those words whenever we concluded our grace before meals. Though I am far removed from my seminary days, I have found myself again praying those same words today, “Vergine Immacolata, aiutaci! Immaculate Virgin, help us!”

The truth is that Mary does help us. When trials or confusion arise, she hastens to our aid. She comes as a tender mother who intercedes for us and points us to her Son, Jesus Christ.

Entering this new year brings both excitement and trepidation, hope and fear, calm and restlessness, but I know that we can move forward confidently under Mary’s protection, confident that will she will give us Jesus, the true Light of all the nations!

May God bless you in this brand new year!

The Very Rev. Brandon E. Macadaeg

FROM THE RCIA COORDINATOR

Happy New Year! What blessings a new year brings! We begin the year with hope and anticipation of things to come, but often find discouragement if things don’t quite go the way we expect. Let us this year make a commitment to persevere in faith. Allow our faith in Christ Jesus to be our hope and anticipation. Let us make a commitment to grow in faith this year by challenging ourselves. Let us think of an area of growth and make a commitment to stick with it. Maybe we can come to a daily Mass once a week, maybe we can commit to reconciliation once a month, maybe we can spend time in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel before or after Mass, maybe we can volunteer at Saint Vincent de Paul, or maybe we can read the Gospels this year. It is time for us to try something new, it is time to grow in our faith. May God continue to bless you and your family in 2020.

Deacon Tim Roberto
FROM THE NEW CATHEDRAL COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Dear Members of the Cathedral Community,

My name is Joey Belleza, and I am happy to join the Parish Staff as the new Communications Manager. I thank the Rector, Fr. Brandon, for this exciting opportunity to work in the Mother Church of the Diocese of Oakland, and I also thank the rest of the Staff for making me welcome as I settle into the new job.

A little about myself: I graduated from De La Salle High School in Concord, California in 2007 and from the University of San Francisco in 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts with honors in Theology & Religious Studies. After graduation from USF, I entered active service in the United States Army as a commissioned officer from 2010 to 2017, with tours across the United States and Germany, an operational deployment to the Republic of Korea, and a combat deployment to Afghanistan. In 2017, I completed my service at the rank of Captain and returned to academic studies at the Dominican School of Philosophy & Theology (DSPT) in Berkeley, California. In September 2019, I completed DSPT’s rigorous dual Master of Arts in Theology-Master of Arts in Philosophy program with honors, defending a thesis entitled “Lex Loquendi, Lex Orandi: Catherine Pickstock & Thomas Aquinas on the Reform of the Roman Offertoria.” I hope to strengthen and contribute to the Cathedral’s evangelization efforts through the philosophical, theological, and leadership skills which I have honed through military service and graduate studies.

As Communications Manager, I have responsibility for the public promotion of the Cathedral’s mission through social media, the Cathedral website, the production of posters and advertisements for Cathedral events, and the monthly Lumen Christi newsletter. Fr. Brandon has asked me to transform the newsletter from a standard parish bulletin format to something more like a magazine that not only features key aspects of our vibrant parish life, but also serves as a vehicle for evangelization and transmission of our Catholic faith. To that end, you will notice that this issue of Lumen Christi has a revamped look and as well as a new feature called Lux Vera (meaning “true light”). Lux Vera presents a few extended reflections on faith-based topics. These may take the form of commentaries on saints and feasts celebrated in the coming month, or something topical in current events, whether in the Church, in our country, or in our community. The intent is to present an opportunity for engagement between faith and daily life, as well as to provide simple opportunities for study or meditation throughout the month. I hope this and other future efforts in Lumen Christi and in Cathedral communications at large will continue to support the parish community.

If you have event to promote or any news that would be useful to the parish as a whole, please do not hesitate to visit me in the Parish Office, during business hours or to email me at jbelleza@oakdiocese.org. It’s my pleasure to be here, and I wish you all God’s abundant blessings in this New Year.

Yours in the Lord,

Jose Isidro (“Joey”) Belleza
Communications Manager
Editor, Lumen Christi
Our Cathedral’s Conroy Memorial Organ turns 10 years old this January! We will celebrate this milestone with a concert in January, featuring the organist and composer David Briggs, Artist-in-Residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

January 7, 2020 ❖ 7:30pm

10TH ANNIVERSARY ORGAN RECITAL
David Briggs, Concert Organist

David Briggs is an internationally renowned organist whose performances are acclaimed for their musicality, virtuosity, and ability to excite and engage audiences of all ages. With an extensive repertoire spanning five centuries, he is known across the globe for his brilliant organ transcriptions of symphonic music by composers such as Mahler, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Bruckner, Ravel, and Bach. Fascinated by the art of Improvisation since a child, David also frequently performs improvisations to silent films such as Phantom of the Opera, Hunchback of Notre-Dame, Nosferatu, Jeanne d’Arc, Metropolis, as well as a variety of Charlie Chaplin films.

At the age of 17, David obtained his FRCO (Fellow of the Royal College of Organists) diploma, winning all the prizes and the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. From 1981-84 he was the Organ Scholar at King’s College, Cambridge University, during which time he studied organ with Jean Langlais in Paris. The first British winner of the Tournemire Prize at the St Albans International Improvisation Competition, he also won the first prize in the International Improvisation Competition at Paisley. Subsequently David held positions at Hereford, Truro and Gloucester Cathedrals. He was Artist-in-Residence at St James Cathedral, Toronto and is currently Artist-in-Residence at the Cathedral of St John the Divine, New York City.

ADMISSION: Free-will offering
The Cathedral of Christ the Light will be hosting the Conference of Roman Catholic Cathedral Musicians. Cathedral musicians from across the country meet annually at a different cathedral each year, and this will be the first time that Oakland is hosting the conference. There will be two liturgies presided by Michael C. Barber, SJ, Bishop of Oakland; all are welcome to attend.

**January 6, 5:30pm**
**SOLEMN VESPERS with choir**

**January 8, 12:10pm**
**MASS with choir**
January 8, 2020  ❖  7:30pm

21ST CENTURY MUSIC IN A 21ST CENTURY CATHEDRAL

Missa Brevis  John Karl Hirten  Requiem  David Briggs  Ave Maria  Frank LaRocca

The Cathedral Camerata and Choir of Men & Boys will present a concert of two 21st century Mass-settings in memory of Fr. Paul Minnihan, first Provost of the Cathedral, who was instrumental in the design and vision for the cathedral. In addition to local East Bay composer Frank LaRocca’s Ave Maria, the concert will feature the premiere of Bay Area organist and composer John Karl Hirten’s Missa Brevis as well as David Briggs’ Requiem.

ADMISSION: $20

Tickets can be purchased by visiting the cathedral website.
www.ctlcathedral.org
Lux Vera

Meditations, Musings, & Miscellanea for the Month

Featuring reflections on:
- the Feast of Mary, Mother of God
- the Epiphany
- the Baptism of the Lord
- Saint Agnes of Rome
- the Conversion of Saint Paul
- and Saint Thomas Aquinas

“...Erat lux vera quae inluminat omnem hominem venientem in mundum.” (Ioan. I, ix-x)

“...He was the true light which enlightens all who come into this world.”

(John 1:9-10)
On the Feast of the Mother of God in 2015, in one of his most theologically sublime homilies, Pope Francis inaugurated that new year by powerfully asserting the unbreakable bond between Christ and the Church. Beginning with the constant presence of Mary throughout Jesus’ life and ending with a story from the Council of Ephesus, Francis delivered a wonderfully edifying sermon, marked by a vibrant Ignatian spirituality, demonstrating the fundamental unity between Christology, Marian devotion, and Ecclesiology.

They [Mary and Jesus] were together, as they were together on Calvary, because Christ and his mother are inseparable: between them exists a bond of great closeness, as exists between every son and his mother. The flesh [corpus] of Christ— which is the fulcrum [cardo, literally, “hinge”] of our salvation (cf. Ter-
tullian)— was woven into the womb of Mary (cf. Psalm 139:13). This inseparability is signified also by the fact that Mary, pre-chosen to be Mother of the Redeemer, shared in His mission, remaining at the side of the Son until his end on Calvary.

Because of this tight bond between Christ and Mary, Francis reminds us that “one cannot understand Jesus without his Mother.” And in true Patristic fashion— as a certain Bavarian Pope would have done— the Pope analogically links Christ’s bond to Mary to Christ’s bond to the Church, for Mary is the archetype of the Church.

Christ and the Church are likewise inseparable, because the Church and Mary always go together, and this is the very mystery of woman in the ecclesial community; and one cannot understand the salvation wrought by Jesus without considering the maternity of the Church. To separate Jesus from the Church would be to introduce “an absurd dichotomy,” as Blessed Paul VI wrote (cf. Evangelii nuntiandi 16). It is not possible “to love Christ but not the Church, to listen to Christ but not listen to the Church, to belong to Christ but outside the Church” (ibid). In fact, it is the Church herself, the great family of God, who brings us to Christ. Our faith is not an abstract doctrine or a philosophy, but is the vital and complete relation with a person: Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God who became man, who died to save us, and who lives among us. Where can we meet him? We meet him in the Church, in our Holy Hierarchical Mother Church.

That last phrase, the reference to “our Holy Hierarchical Mother Church”, resounds with the unshakable faith of the Jesuits of old. Pope Francis emphatically pronounced that phrase in his homily, underlining it as a matter not to be taken lightly. This, of course, is a direct reference to Saint Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, who as part of his Spiritual Exercises included “certain rules for being one in mind with the Church” (the famous section concerning the sentire cum Ecclesia, or “thinking with the Church”). Among these rules, we find:

First Rule: All judgment laid aside, we ought to have our mind ready and prompt to obey, in all matters, the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, which is our holy Mother the Church Hierarchical. . .

Thirteenth Rule: that in all things we may discern the truth and err in no matter, we must always firmly hold that, upon seeing white, I should believe it to be black, if the Hierarchical Church defined it so, believing that believing that between Christ our Lord the Bridegroom, and the Church his Bride, there is the same Spirit who governs and directs us for the salvation of our souls, for by the same Spirit and our Lord who issued the Decalogue, our holy Mother the Church is directed and governed.

The maternity of Mary is the model of the Church’s maternity; just as the Son of God came into the world through Mary, Jesus Christ remains in the world today through the Church. By invoking Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, Francis exhorts all men to the humble, filial obedience owed to our Holy Mother Church. The inclusion of the word “hierarchical” for Ignatius (and Francis) implies the mark of apostolicity, the divinely constituted structure of the Church, through which is exercised the authority to teach and govern the faithful. Under the guidance of the entire college of bishops, who themselves are legitimately constituted with and under the Successor of Peter, the faithful can encounter Christ himself through the holy sacraments.

Returning to the homily text, we saw Francis mentioning that “the Church and Mary always go together, and that this is mystery of woman in the ecclesial community.” What does he mean by this? The answer is simple, if one sees the central theme of this Feast and of the homily: maternity! Of course, this does not always mean a literal maternity— although the Church certainly grows stronger as Christian mothers raise

January 1: The Feast of Mary, Mother of God
their children in the faith. The mission of women in the Church is a spiritual maternity, to follow the example of the Virgin, lovingly accompanying the Church in its joys and triumphs, caring and providing for all her children. This is a distinct role from the paternal task of sacramental ministry, which falls to the ordained clergy. All this is completely in line with something Francis has said before—“women need to be valued in the Church, not clericalized”. In not so many words, the Pope reasserted the uniqueness of women, which, of course, implies the complementarity-in-difference of the sexes.

Francis completed his reflection by recalling the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 where, in an effort to quash the Nestorian heresy (which, in short, denied the unity of human and divine in the Incarnation), the Council officially bestowed on Mary the title Θεοτόκος (Theotokos) or “bearer of God.” This declaration affirmed in fact that Jesus Christ was truly God and man from the beginning of his earthly life.

Ephesus is where, according to Sacred Tradition, the Virgin Mother spent the final years of her earthly life, and her house in that city remains a pilgrimage site to this day; accordingly, the people of Ephesus have always held a deep devotion to the Virgin. It is no surprise, therefore, that during the Council, the people of Ephesus vigorously pushed the assembled bishops to uphold the perennial doctrine of the Church by honoring Mary. The ancient title Theotokos became the people’s rallying cry, and we know that the bishops heard their plea. In concluding his homily, Francis said:

Let us look upon Mary, let us contemplate the Holy Mother of God. And I suggest that you all greet her together, just like the brave people of Ephesus, who shouted before her pastors when they entered into the Church, “Holy Mother of God!” What a beautiful greeting for our Mother! There is a story—I’m not sure if it’s true—that some of the people of Ephesus held clubs in their hands, perhaps to make the bishops understand what would happen to them if they had not the courage to proclaim Mary as “Mother of God.” I invite you all—without clubs—to stand and to greet her three times, with the greeting of the ancient Church: “Holy Mother of God!”

Accordingly, the faithful present in St. Peter’s Basilica rose to their feet, and facing the statue of Mary near the altar, exclaimed three times, Santa Madre di Dio! And in thrice acclaiming the Mother of God, we at the same time thrice acclaim our Holy Mother Church, who takes Mary as her archetype; therefore, let us be obedient to the Church as Christ was obedient to Mary, for though the Church—as through the Virgin Mother—we encounter the blessed Son of God and Son of Mary, our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be praise, honor, and glory now and forever. • J.B.

**January 6: The Epiphany (Transferred to Jan 5)**

In the so-called “Bible Belt” of the southern United States (where I once lived), FM radio stations will often eschew normal musical programming on Sunday mornings in favor of live broadcasts of Protestant Christian services. As I was driving to Mass for the Epiphany, there was a Methodist pastor on the radio delivering a sermon on the exact same reading I would later hear at Mass—the story of the Magi from Matthew’s Gospel. The sermon was good for the most part, and it could have even been a decent homily for a Catholic Mass, until the pastor said something that struck me as odd: “It is one of the great tragedies of the Gospel that, after following the star all the way to Jerusalem, the wise men had to stop and ask for directions, when the star would have taken them straight to the manger.” After all, the preacher noted, as soon as the wise men left Herod’s court, they found the star again, which “stopped over the place where the child lay.” The implication is that the Magi momentarily doubted the guidance which had thus far brought them to Jerusalem.

With all due respect to that pastor, I think he missed the point; it wasn’t a tragedy at all. To help us understand, we Catholics have at our disposal two profound reflections from two Popes: Benedict XVI’s 2012 Easter Vigil homily and Francis’ 2013 Epiphany homily. In the latter reflection, Francis says that “the Magi, when they arrived in Jerusalem, lost sight of the star for a time. They no longer saw it.” The light of the star “was particularly absent from the palace of Herod: his dwelling was gloomy, filled with darkness, suspicion, fear, envy”. In the same vein and in his classically eloquent style, Benedict said during his last Easter Vigil, “Today we can illuminate our cities so brightly that the stars of the sky are no longer visible. Is this not an image of the problems caused by our version of enlightenment?” The “enlightened” court of Herod, located in the midst of an ancient metropolis caught up in the hustle and bustle of Caesar’s census, could not see what these wise men from the east could see. Herod and his court, blinded by sin, could only hold a narrow gaze on the trappings of earthly power. The lights of Jerusalem, fueled by the profane desires of Herod and his Roman masters, washed out the light of Christ’s star. The Magi, by contrast, did not momentarily doubt or ignore the star; the star itself was obscured, unable to radiate in a place brooding with evil.

What the preacher superficially called a “tragedy” in fact veils a more profound lesson: the journey of the Magi is an allegory of the ascent of the mind to God. The wise men, sincere searchers of the truth, discerned the truth in the structure of the cosmos and of (continued on the next page)
the natural world. This represents the capacity of natural human reason to perceive truth, and ultimately, God. Indeed, Christian philosophy professes that the existence of God can be ascertained, without recourse to grace and supernatural faith, through the methods of natural reason. By “natural reason” we mean the process of reasoning based on given, self-evident, non-religious principles. Such principles, among others, include:

- the principle of non-contradiction (if $A$ is not $B$, then $A$ cannot be $A$ and $B$ at the same time and in the same manner)
- the transitive property (if $A=B$ and $B=C$, then $A=C$)
- every effect must have a cause
- the impossibility of an infinite regress of essentially ordered causes

These principles form the basis of the logic, arithmetic, and natural philosophy which inform our everyday existence. It is on the basis of such principles that the famous “proofs for the existence of God” by various Christian theologians (e.g., St. Anselm’s ontological proof; St. Thomas Aquinas’ famous “five ways,” etc.) demonstrate the reasonableness, and indeed, the truth of monotheism. **Belief in one God is thus a natural truth**. However, mere monotheism is not the fullness of truth. As Christians, we believe that the fullness of truth is in Jesus Christ. **No procedure of natural reason, no syllogism, no amount of secular reflection can ever prove that Jesus Christ is the Incarnate, only-begotten, eternal Son of the Father who will ransom humanity from sin.** None of the classic proofs for the existence of God ever say anything about Christ, or the Holy Spirit, or the Church, or the Bible. The belief that Christ is Lord is a truth that must be given from on high, received, and accepted. This is **revealed truth**, for it comes from the revelation of God, and is not grasped by the unaided human mind. Faith only springs from the grace-filled positive response of men and women to the revelation of God. Thus, by discerning the signs of the natural world and following the star, the Magi came close to the newborn King, but lost their way in Jerusalem’s maze. Only after consulting Herod’s scholars— or rather, after consulting the revelation contained in Holy Scripture— did the Magi discover that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem, the City of David. **In the palace, the Magi passed through a moment of obscurity and desolation, which they were able to overcome thanks to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who speaks through the prophecies of Sacred Scripture. These indicated that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, the City of David.**

The story of the Magi teaches us even more: when the wise men gazed upon the Christ child and beheld his divine splendor, **they gave precious gifts and did him homage.** True worship is inseparable from giving of our best to God. The Gospel of Matthew, written to prove to Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, thus harkens back to the story of Cain and Abel; God was pleased with Abel, who gave the firstborn and fattest of his flock in sacrifice. Cain, however, offered up his produce, far less valuable that the offering of his brother— and this was displeasing to the Lord. There is also a connection with the Gospel of John (and the parallel accounts in the Synoptics), which recounts Judas’ protest as a woman anointed the Lord with precious ointment (“This could have been sold for silver and given to the poor!”), as well as Christ’s stinging counter-rebuke (“The poor you will have always”). “She has done a beautiful thing for me,” said Jesus, for he knew it to be a true act of worship towards him (cf. Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8).

Thus when the Church sponsors splendid art, brilliant vestments, precious vessels, and all the other beautiful things which adorn so many well-built churches throughout the world, it is an expression of an authentic liturgical sense which concretely gives God the best and greatest of our possessions. St. John Vianney, patron saint of priests, slept in rags; still, he accepted the finest offerings of silver ornamentation to edify his chapel at Ars. Francis of Assisi, patron of the poor, **firmly admonished clerics** who did not carry the Eucharist in the most precious of vessels. As the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I) says, we offer **God de sui donis ac datis**, returning to him the gifts that he has firstly given us. On the Feast of the Epiphany, let us learn follow the example of the wise men by bringing to God the very best of what we have. There is no price that can match the priceless worth of the Paschal Mystery; and thus our worship should shine with all the solemnity and splendor— both interior and exterior— that we can offer.

To conclude, let us turn again to the wise words preached by Francis in the Vatican Basilica, and remember that to stop and ask for like the Magi is not a “tragedy”; rather, turning to revelation is the remedy that corrects our course when we lose sight of the Lord’s light. By receiving the revelation of God, we too enter into the mystery of the Incarnation and find the fullness of truth, who is Christ Jesus. Thus, the Pope says:

The Magi entered into the mystery. They passed from human calculations into mystery: this was their conversion. What of our conversion? Let us ask the Lord that he grant us the ability to embark upon the same path of conversion trod by the Magi. That he defend us and free us from the temptations which hide his star. That we might always have the restlessness to ask ourselves, “Where is the star?” whenever— in the midst of the temptations of the world— we lose sight of it. That we might
always have the restlessness to ask ourselves, “Where is the star?” whenever—in the midst of the temptations of the world—we lose sight of it. That we might learn to understand, in ways ever new, the mystery of God, that we are not scandalized by the “sign” told by the angel: “a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger,” and that we might have the humility to ask his Mother—our Mother—that she show him to us. That we might find the courage to free ourselves from our illusions, from our presumptions, from our own “lights,” that we might find this courage in the humility of faith, and that we might encounter this light, the Lumen Gentium, as the holy Magi found him. May we enter into the mystery. Amen. • J.B.

**January 12: The Baptism of the Lord**

Here is a typical Eastern representation of the Baptism of the Lord. The waters of Baptism flow down the center of the image, flanked by mountains; a host of angels attends this great Theophany, or unveiling of God; on the left, an axe lies at the foot of a tree, recalling the prophecy of John the Baptist: “And now also the ax is laid to the root of the trees: therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:10); the waters and the creatures in it roll back in fear from Jesus, echoing the psalmist: “the sea saw and fled, the Jordan turned back” (Psalm 114:3); the Holy Spirit descends as a dove out of heaven; John, though he is the one with authority to baptize, humbly bows before the manifestation of God while gazing in wonder at the Father in heaven; Christ, on the other hand, stands tall and upright, almost as if above the water, blessing the water. The density of symbolism and richness of the image warrant volumes of commentary, and while we cannot undertake an expansive study here, let us reflect on three aspects of the Lord’s Baptism as we approach this feast.

1. **On water.** Yes, Baptism is new life, and water is a symbol of life, something readily apparent in the testimony of Scripture: “As the deer longs for founts of water, so does my soul desire to be unto you” (Psalm 42); “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within him” (John 7); examples can be multiplied. In fact, so deep-seated is our tendency to associate water with life that a famous passage from Romans 6, upon closer inspection, might puzzle us by its correlation between baptism and death:

   Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

   Is Paul, a great Jewish scholar, denying water’s “life force” as attested by Scripture? Certainly not. Yet how can he associate baptism firstly with death? Here we should distinguish between two types of water. The first type, the life-giving water, is often mentioned as “flowing”; “streams”, “sources”, and “founts” give us this flowing, living water. These are small, controlled conduits of water, whose calm and measured effusions satiate the dry desert’s thirst and cause it to issue life.

   The second type of water is the Sea: vast, powerful, and uncontrollable. In ancient times, sailors who set out upon the Sea often never returned. Its infinite horizon and unpredictable temperament incited fear and awe in the hearts of people, and this idea of a “raging Sea of death” informs the earliest stories of the Bible. In Genesis, we read that in the beginning, “the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters” (Genesis 1:2); the Hebrew word for “abyss” signified the primordial, chaotic ocean according to the old Semitic worldview, and these “waters” over which swept God’s “mighty wind” represents the unfathomable, lifeless void, the pure nothingness from which God created old things.

   The creation story of Genesis 1 is a story of a God who twice “splits the waters” as he wields his creative power, first separating the waters above the firmament and below the firmament, then by bringing forth dry land in the midst of the lower waters. The chaotic Sea retreats before the creative power of Author of Life. Years later, when mankind falls away from God and merits the destruction of the world, the Almighty sends the Flood to wipe out his creation. The only traces of life, Noah’s family and the remnants of the animal kingdom, remain safely in the Ark, sailing above the waters of death. When the people Israel are released from the bondage of Egypt, they arrive at the seemingly impassable Red Sea, trapped between the waters on one side and Pharaoh’s army on the other; but God again “splits the waters,” and Moses leads the Israelites (continued on next page)
dry-shod across the seabed. As the Egyptians give chase, God releases the waters of death and vanquishes the slavemasters. The Exodus becomes Israel’s “baptism” into nationhood. Thus, for the Jews of old, water was a powerful and readily apprehensible symbol of death and destruction. This is why the Gospel stories in which Jesus calms the seas, and walks on water were so captivating to the early Jewish-Christians. These episodes demonstrate that Jesus Christ is truly God, for the waters of death obey his command; he walks over the abyss as Noah sailed over the Flood.

Now, Paul’s statement comes into striking relief: baptism is a descent into the primordial abyss of death. Christ’s baptism foreshadows his Passion and descent into true bodily death. Jesus will “empty himself” (Philippians 2) and dive into the sea of chaos; re-emerging victoriously, he “splits the waters” and opens up the way to new life in the Spirit. Christ becomes the archetype of Israel and Psalm 114 rings true again: “When Israel came out of Egypt, Jacob from a people of foreign tongue, Judah became God’s sanctuary, Israel his dominion. The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back.” We too are therefore called to baptism, to die with Christ, and to rise with him to new life.

2. On the relationship between Christ and the Baptist

As mentioned before, in Eastern imagery, Christ stands upright in the river as John bows in reverence, eyes fixed on heaven. In the Western tradition, the positions are reversed: Christ assumes a posture of humble prayer while John stands above him, looking down on Jesus with authority. Compare the Greek icon above with Perugino’s famous depiction of the same scene:

All the great masters of the Renaissance follow this pattern in portrayals of the Baptism. Which is correct, the Latin tradition or the Greek? Of course, we would have to say that both, taken together, are correct; in their difference, they each emphasize the two different natures in the person of Christ. The typical Greek iconographer puts Christ’s divinity in focus, while the artists of the West tended to humanize Jesus. But what does this have to do with Christ and John?

An excursus into the realm of liturgy, specifically, the direction of liturgical prayer, might shed some light. The testimony of early Greek and Latin Christianity attests to the universality of prayer ad orientem (literally, “toward the east”). Initially, this was a holdover from its Semitic past in which the worshipers and the priest faced the same direction, orienting themselves towards the location of God’s presence. In Jewish antiquity, this meant facing the direction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Muslims likewise pray toward the holy city of Mecca. But with the revelation of Christ, a radical change occurred in the Christian consciousness.

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen!” (Luke 24:5-6). The words of the angel to the incredulous disciples resonated with the early Christians, who realized that the time foretold by Christ to the Samaritan woman had arrived: “the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem… [that hour is] now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him” (John 4:21-23). Thus the disciples understood that worship could no longer be tied to a particular geographical place. Christ had ascended into heaven, into the fullness of the cosmos, now equally accessible to all creation. Christians therefore oriented their worship not toward an earthly city, but toward the ever-receding, ever-expanding horizon of the East, in joyful expectation of the return of the Son of Man, who is the rising sun of history. As a general rule, the primitive communities accordingly built their churches from West to East to make the liturgy a visible concretization of this new messianic expectation.

Considering the history of the Church and her religious art, we recognize another ad orientem dimension; we know that the Church arose in the East and spread to the West. Although Rome holds the primacy, she still must always look ad orientem, towards that horizon from where she received the Christian faith, never to forget the Graeco-Semitic roots of that precious doctrine which she now guards with jealous tenacity. If we likewise view the iconography of the Baptism in an ad orientem, “West-to-East” manner, we find that in the Latin tradition, Christ humbles himself before John, while in the Greek images, John humbles himself before Christ. In the West, the Forerunner is superior, but, moving Eastward, the Lamb takes prominence. Seen this way, both artistic traditions of West and East supply fresh meaning to the words of Baptist: “I must decrease; He must increase” (John 3:30). Every Christian must own that statement, for even He who must increase became the last of all and humbled himself unto death on a Cross. John preceded his cousin into the waters of baptism and thus preceded him in death; in this way he “prepared the way of the Lord and made straight his paths” (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 3:3). Through our own baptisms, we are called to be new Forerunners for the Parousia, ready to suffer the same fate as the Baptist.

3. On the Kingship of Christ

What we Latins call “the Baptism of the Lord” the Greeks bestow the fitting name “Theophany” -- the revelation of God. It is the unveiling of the Trinity: the voice of the Father, the presence of the Son-in-flesh, and the dove-like Spirit are made manifest in one moment. We hear the words from the Father heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” To the Jews of Jesus’ time, these words speedily brought to mind Psalm 2, which begins:
Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, “Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.” The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.” I will proclaim the Lord’s decree: He said to me, “You are my son; this day I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”

This was the coronation formula of Israel’s kings, which was in turn borrowed from the ancient coronation rites of other Near East civilizations. The idea of the king as begotten by a god by virtue of his ascension to the throne functioned as a form of “divine right” which legitimized the king’s reign. But the formula continues, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession”. Yes, the Persians, Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians at certain points amassed expansive territorial gains, and the boast of the coronation rites could have been fitting in those cases, but we know the ultimate fate of all these empires. Even less could be said of Israel’s kingdom, dwarfed in size and prestige by its polytheistic neighbors. Soon, the coronation formula will appear to be pure mockery when applied to Israel’s king, and will become bitter irony as, in later years, the Temple will be razed and the Promised Land absorbed by the various empires.

In captivity and subjugation, the Jews realized that the king foretold by the Psalm had not yet come; thus the theology of election expressed in the coronation rite became a theology of hope and expectation for the true king who would fulfill the oracle. Perhaps he would not be a worldly king, like those of Israel’s neighbors, for they too will see death and their empires will wither. No, the Messiah is something greater, but just what exact form he will take remains hidden from their eyes.

Through Jesus comes the supreme manifestation of God. As the kings of old were anointed by prophets and priests, so too is Jesus anointed by John, the last prophet of the Jews. Immersion in water—immersion into death—replaces the unction of oil, and the Son is also anointed with the Holy Spirit. His election is proclaimed not by a priest—not by God’s human surrogate—but by the Father himself, who, by using the old formula of coronation, definitively establishes the permanence of the Kingdom—a Kingdom not of this world (John 18:36). Having been anointed and with his election confirmed by the Father, Jesus now goes to the synagogue at Capernaum; taking the scroll of Psalm 61, he dramatically makes these ancient words his own, saying:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God.” Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:18-21)

**Conclusion**

Through the symbolism of water, we understand how Baptism signifies Christ’s victory over death. By looking at the images of the Baptism from the Greek and Latin traditions, we glimpse both the divinity and humanity of Jesus, while John teaches us that to truly preach Christ entails a firm grounding in humility, even unto death, deferring always to the Lamb of God. Finally, the Baptism functions as Jesus’ coronation, by which his Sonship is made known to John and his disciples, and is the beginning of his public ministry of preaching the Kingdom—a Kingdom of the humble and meek, who as “children of God” shall inherit the nations and possess the ends of the earth. For as Christ will tell the multitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven… Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.” (Matthew 5:3-5) • J.B.
was cut down like lambs at the slaughter and brought to the brink of extinction. At Symphronius' command, Agnes died by a soldier's sword in a Roman stadium, in the sight of citizen and slave alike, like a humiliated and defeated gladiator. Born into a noble family, she fell from patriarchian grace and thus fell from earthly life, yet Jerome insists: Agnes conquered. By the logic of the world, this is tragic nonsense, but through the logic of the Logos, the "folly of the Gentiles" becomes the "wisdom of the Cross" (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-31). Agnes, filled with this wisdom, "would not as a bride so hasten to the bed, for as a virgin she went happily to the place of punishment with quickened pace, her head not adorned with plaited hair, but with Christ," wrote Jerome's contemporary, the mighty Ambrose of Milan.

Roman paganism did not recognize an eternal life in the profound sense that Christians understand. Great figures only "lived on" through their permanence in the memory of the people. Thus the Caesars commissioned statues, arches, and monuments bearing their names and likenesses; chronicles of worldly their achievements were etched in marble in an attempt to ensure their immortality. Conversely, men who obtained the hatred of the people and of succeeding emperors were punished after their deaths through the so-called damnatio memoriae; their statues were effaced, their inscriptions erased, any records bearing their names were destroyed, heirs were often murdered or exiled, and mere mention of them was treated as a crime. If you "killed" the memory and posterity of a man, it was as if he never existed.

Saint Jerome (347-420 AD), writing within only two generations after Agnes (died 306 AD), experienced a Rome completely different from that of the young virgin. Just seven years after Agnes' execution, Constantine not only legalized Christianity but decreed reparations for the persecutions (313 AD). From the ashes and shadows of the catacombs, the flock of Christ emerged into the light of blessed freedom, now testifying the truth of the Gospel without the specter of a sword hanging overhead. The relics of many saints were brought from the ancient crypts outside the city and returned to the places of their final Testimony, whereupon Christians built shrines as new τρόπαια (trophæa or trophies), new battle monuments to commemorate the victory won there. Soon enough, these shrines became places of pilgrimage; some old pagan monuments fell into neglect and ruin, while others were stripped and rebuilt into Christian sanctuaries. Visions of these public, above-ground Christian edifices in the midst of deteriorating pagan artifices must have been on Jerome's mind when he wrote the aforementioned words. To him, the damnatio memoriae of pagan trophæa in favor of the new Christian τρόπαια was sure proof that that Agnes, like so many Roman martyrs, had finally "conquered the age."

One such "trophy" testifying to the victory of martyrdom is the church of Sant’Agnese in Agone, seen in the photo above. Its impressive, 17th century façade, designed by Borromini dominates Piazza Navona and dwarfs Bernini's majestic "Fountain of the Four Rivers" which lies before the church. Built upon the foundations of an earlier shrine dedicated to Agnes, the present edifice stands on the traditional site of her martyr-

dom. In fact, the basilica's qualifying epithet in agone refers indirectly to the "agony" that Agnes and many others suffered here (note: Wikipedia mistakenly says that "The name of this church is unrelated to the 'agony' of the martyr"). The Greek ἁγνιεία (agonia) means "struggle" or "competition", whence agone, a reference to the gladiator fights and chariot races which took place in what is now called Piazza Navona. ("Navona" is just an old local corruption of the Greek agone.)

If today you enter this gorgeous piazza from the south end and read one of the plaques telling you where you are, you will not read "Piazza Navona" but "Stadio Domiziano"—the Stadium of Domitian, named for the Roman emperor who built this arena for these violent matches. The perimeter of its track corresponds exactly to the ancient race track, and many of the surrounding buildings of today were built from the stadium's old arcades. In this setting of public display, where gladiators slaughtered each other for the people's entertainment, Agnes entered into her own ἁγνιεία, her own struggle, and refused to falter in the face of Roman infidels. Today, Borromini's towering church marks the spot which Agnes made holy by her blood, and her head is kept here for the veneration of the faithful.

Back to Jerome: he writes that Agnes "consecrated the title of chastity by her martyrdom." Such a phrase may appear strange and curious to us modern Christians, for time has obscured much of the delightful Latin and Greek wordplay in early Christian writings. Agnes' name comes from the Greek ἁγνία (hagne), meaning "chaste". By her martyrdom, she became known as a Saint. Thus in her native Greek tongue, the Christians called her by a snappy, alliterative title: ἁγία ἁγνία (hagia hagne), which means "Saint Agnes" or "Holy Agnes"—hence she personified "Holy Chastity," and her chastity was sanctified through her death. Accordingly, Ambrose wrote of her, "in one victim there is twofold martyrdom, of modesty and of religion. She both remained a virgin and she obtained martyrdom."
In art, Agnes is often depicted with a lamb, due to the similarity between her name and the Latin *agnus*, meaning lamb. But the masters of the Renaissance, cultured and learned as they were, kept the motif despite the linguistic error. Instead, the masters knew that though the literal sense was violated, the profound spiritual sense found wonderful expression through the error. They recognized the obvious parallel to Christ, the Lamb of God, who, “like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep before the shearsers, was silent and opened not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). So too was Agnes like the sacrificial lambs of old: young, innocent, and without the blemish of carnal knowledge, she made of herself an oblation most acceptable to God, “consecrating the title of chastity by her martyrdom.”

Every year on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29), the Pope bestows the Pallium, a mantle made of lamb’s wood, upon each of the metropolitan archbishops appointed over the last year. The wool is taken from lambs which were blessed by the Pope on the previous Feast of Saint Agnes at the church of Sant’Agnese in Via Nomentana (St. Agnes outside the walls), the original site of Agnes’ burial and the place where the rest of her body lies today. As the Pope imposes the Pallium on the archbishops, he recites a prayer that says in part: *sit vinculum caritatis et fortitudinis incitamentum*—may the Pallium “be a bond of charity and fount of strength”. Much is made of the Pallium’s symbol as a bond of charity; it is worn on the shoulders as a “yoke”, symbolizing the special and direct bond between each metropolitan archbishop with the Pope, who likewise wears his own Pallium.

If today you ask an average Roman, “Who was Diocletian?” you might hear mention of his horrific persecutions, his establishment of the ill-fated Tetrarchy, and his abdication into shame. Then if you ask, “Who was Symphronius?”, you will more often than not elicit silence, blank stares, confusion, or ignorance. The memory of Symphronius means nothing to those who came after him, except through his connection to a Christian girl named Agnes. Over the centuries, a slow, subtle *damnatio memoriae* has taken effect on Symphronius and to a lesser extent on Diocletian, while innumerable churches and countless women throughout the world possess the name of that holy virgin.

But if you ask a Roman, “Who was Agnes?”, he’ll tell you the story of a noble girl who refused the perverted advances of pagan men; that when her insulted suitors revealed her Christian faith to the Prefect, she was arrested and sent to a brothel, but that by some miracle no man was able to touch her; that she was brought to Domitian’s *circus agonalis*, where the fuel to burn her body failed to catch fire; and finally, with her head bowed and arms outstretched, she unflinchingly received a sword upon her neck with joyful countenance; wherefore in eternity she beholds the joyful countenance of Him for whom she poured her blood.

Regarding Diocletian and Symphronius, the memory of the contemporary Roman is weak and thus his verdict is harsh; but ask him about Saint Agnes, and he will point you to her trophy, that splendid victory monument which to this day holds her head as an earthly reminder of her divine Testimony— and in this manner, the Roman will justify Jerome, proving that Agnes has indeed conquered. • J.B.

### JANUARY 25: THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL

On that journey as I drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from the sky suddenly shone around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ I replied, ‘Who are you, sir?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazorean whom you are persecuting.’ My companions saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who spoke to me. I asked, ‘What shall I do, sir?’ The Lord answered me, ‘Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything appointed for you to do.’ Since I could see nothing because of the brightness of that light, I was led by hand by my companions and entered Damascus. (Acts 22:6-11)

In Caravaggio’s masterful depiction of this liturgical commemoration, Saul of Tarsus is dressed in the proud attire of a prominent Roman citizen, adorned with breastplate and helmet, on his way to raid the Christians of Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains. But somewhere along the road, the future Apostle is thwarted, struck down by a heavenly vision. Saul literally falls from his high horse and (continued on next page)
lies helplessly on his back as the animal towers over him. His boastful red garments lie strewn around his body like flowing blood, and Saul’s sword is likewise bathed in the scarlet robe— a wonderful artistic foreshadowing of the man’s ultimate fate. Against the background of darkness— in the manner perfected by Caravaggio— a singular beam of light illuminates the foreground, placing in vivid relief the image of Saul the defeated Pharisee, robbed of his sight, vainly trying to reach and grope his way toward some tangible and familiar object. But, even in the presence of his horse and companion, he is utterly alone, drowning in the black abyss of his sin, like Peter who while sinking into the sea of Galilee called out, “Lord, save me!” (Matthew 14:29-30). Only that singular beam of light— Christ himself, the “Light of Revelation unto the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32)— can vanquish the surrounding darkness, make visible our state of sin, and lead us on the road toward salvation.

Yet while Saul remains upon the ground, a significant reversal of roles has occurred. Whereas the great Pharisee once rode atop the horse, secure in the spot of authority, he now seems dwarfed by the size of the beast. The horse, with eyes are fixed on Saul, nonchalantly raises a leg as if to avoid some pest. Saul is vanquished, trampled underfoot by his own anger and pride. From hence he no longer takes the name of a famous Israelite king, but instead takes the name “Paul”, meaning “little one.” In later years, he writes to the Hebrews a letter that is just as much a rebuke of his past self: “How much more severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:29). Now Paul himself has been humbled and trampled underfoot, and after having received the punishment of blindness, he is then called to carry the Light of Christ to the Gentiles.

The glory of God is so great that Moses had to veil his face when it passed him, and when he descended from Sinai, Moses’ “face shone brightly”. Paul, who beheld that glory unveiled, lost his vision of the physical realm. Through this blindness, he became painfully aware that he cannot not take hold of God as a possession by virtue of his extensive knowledge of the Law; rather, he himself needed to be possessed by God. On the road to Damascus, Paul “saw” the fundamentally passive aspect of revelation: the Lord shines his grace on his people, and his people do not approach his glory without having been moved first by grace. Here, the Psalm takes a fresh meaning: “Send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy mount and to Your dwelling places” (Psalm 43:4). Christ is that Light and that Truth, and one must be led by Him unto the tabernacle of the Lord.

“Since I could see nothing because of the brightness of that light, I was led by hand by my companions and entered Damascus,” says the Apostle. Physical blindness has stripped Paul of all arrogance, making him recognize his “littleness”— his Paul-ness— before the majesty of God. Thus he can tell the church at Corinth, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7), for although he was blinded, grace led him to Damascus, where Ananias would heal him, and where he will learn to see not through eyes of flesh, but through eyes of faith.

Paul’s conversion is fundamentally a story of God’s wisdom and power: the Almighty can take the unworthiest things and fashion them into instruments of his grace. He chooses Matthew, a notorious extortionist, to bring the gospel to Ethiopia; he chooses Thomas, who doubted the resurrection, to bring Christ to India; he chose Peter, who thrice denied the Lord, to lead the universal Church; he chose Paul, who stood guard while a crowd stoned Saint Stephen to death, to evangelize the Greeks. All these examples in which God perfects what is imperfect are ultimately small manifestations of God’s unfathomable, ineffable might— the same might by which he took hold of death itself and opened it to eternal life. Like Paul, we Christians must continuously undergo our own conversion, to turn our face to the Lord, to let ourselves be overwhelmed by his immense power so that, even when we are trampled underfoot by the Prince of This World, we will be led by Light and Truth unto the Lord’s holy mountain and into his dwelling. • J.B.
As an unabashed Thomist, one of my favorite images in the Vatican Museums, often overlooked by tourists rushing to see the Sistine Chapel, is a portrait by Ludwig Seitz in the ceiling of the Galleria dei Candelabri, shown here. Three angels bear the works of Thomas Aquinas; one can see the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, the *Summa Theologica*, and various biblical commentaries (the book on the right is labeled *commentaria in sacram Scripturam*—not the title of a singular work of Thomas but a representation of all his exegetical projects). Allegorical personifications of various ideologies reel in awe-struck terror as the heavenly messengers brandish the works of Aquinas. A pagan is almost made blind at the sight of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* while a Turk can barely look at it; Jewish scholars likewise cower at the scriptural commentaries, while a Reformed Christian (possibly resembling Jan Hus?) is confounded by the *Summa Theologica*. Offensive for some and amusing for others (like me), it’s a fanciful depiction, characteristic of the Catholic triumphalism of the late 19th century in which this work was produced.

While one may not agree with the blunt, adversarial nature of Seitz’ work, it does point to an important aspect of the life of Thomas. Brilliant, prolific, industrious, and pious, Thomas is a monumental figure not only in theology, not only for the Church, but in the intellectual history of Western civilization. As the picture above implies, Thomas set out to let shine the majesty of God to Christian and non-Christian alike, and his contributions to philosophy still resonate in the contemporary world. For this reason the Church counts him as one of her Doctors, with the appellative “Angelic”; with unparalleled clarity of mind and expression, it seems as he perceived the divine mysteries as only angels know it.

Thomas is first and foremost known to the secular world as a theologian and philosopher, but most importantly to Catholics, he is revered as a Saint. Unlike so many professional theologians today, he was not a mere academic whose intellectual pursuits push personal piety to the margins of daily life. Instead, like so many Christian mystics, Thomas’ life boasts of a true *fama sanctitatis*. He is very much like a medieval version of St. Paul: uncompromising in his faith, eloquent in his writing and preaching, and intensely devoted to Christ, the Church, and the Sacraments. Once he was convinced of a vocation in the Order of Preachers, he endured over a year of imprisonment and sinister temptation at the hands of his own family, who willed for him to become abbot of the powerful Abbey of Montecassino rather than a poor Dominican Friar. In the end, his family could not shake his iron-clad will, and he happily entered the Dominican convent at Naples. After studies in Naples (where he first discovered the philosophy of Aristotle) and Paris (where he studied under Saint Albert the Great), Thomas was thrust into the limelight of the ecclesiastical world for his commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard. In time, his astute intelligence earned him an appointment as the Theologian of the Papal Household, which to this day is still held by a distinguished theologian from the Order of Preachers.

After hearing of the Miracle of Bolsena (in which a host consecrated by Peter of Prague bled onto the altar cloths), Pope Urban IV ordered the Feast of Corpus Christi to be instituted for the entire Latin Rite and commissioned Thomas to compose a new liturgical Office for this feast. This includes the texts and hymns for all canonical hours of the day as well as the propers for the Mass of the feast. Through this commission, Thomas has bequeathed the Church with beautiful liturgical hymns which should be dear to every Catholic heart: *Adoro te devote*, *Lauda sion Salvatorem*, *Sacrís sollemnis*, *Verbum supernum prodiens*, and, of course, the most famous *Pange lingua gloriosi*. In contrast to the lengthy technical expositions which characterize the majority of his works, these hymns offer us in their terse, rhythmic, rhyming lines a splendid poetic synthesis of his intense piety and devotion to the Eucharistic Lord, the source of all his philosophical and theological inspiration. (continued on next page)
His fervor and zeal for the Catholic religion was only matched by his deep, personal humility. Throughout his life, he consistently and obsti-
nately refused any ecclesiastical dignity. Even when Pope Clement IV
offered to make him Archbishop of Naples, he respectfully declined. Like
Francis of Assisi, Thomas relinquished his nobility for a life of poverty in
order to better lead a clerical life without the trappings of high office.
And like Francis, he too received ecstatic visions of the glory of God
throughout his life, and near the end, he experienced a vision so great
that he halted work on the Summa Theologica. As witnessed by Dominic
of Caserta and retold by his friend and secretary, Blessed Reginald of
Piperno, Thomas was enraptured a particularly intense ecstasy while cele-
brating Mass in the Dominican convent at Naples, and it appeared as if
the Lord himself were speaking to the friar through the altar crucifix.
Bene scripsisti de me, Thoma: quam mercedem accipies? “Thou hast
written well of me, Thomas. What reward wilt thou have?” And Thomas,
with the same meekness which illuminated his saintly life, famously re-
plied, non aliam nisi Teipsum, Domine— “Nothing other than yourself,
O Lord.” After having received this vision, when Reginald begged Thom-
as to continue work on the Summa, he refused, saying, omnia quae
scripsi mihi videtur ut palea— “Everything I have written seems like
chaff to me”. In his mystical experience, he realized the inadequacy
of human words to contain the vast mystery of God, and here too he saw
the coming end of his earthly life.

On the way to the Council of Lyon, at which Pope Gregory X requested
Thomas’ assistance in the attempt to reunify the Greek and Latin church-
es, Thomas struck his head on a fallen branch and fell near Terracina; he
would not reach the Council. He was sent to heal, first at Maienza, then
to Fossa Nuova’s Cistercian monastery. Even in the throes of grave ill-
ness, Thomas’ humility shone through with unfailing vigor. When monks
carried the fuel for Thomas’ fireplace to his room, the ailing theologian
exclaimed, “Wherefore this honor that the servants of God should bring
my firewood!” He indulged the request of the Cistercians by dictating one
last commentary on the Song of Songs. However, reaching the verse
“Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field” (7:12), he stopped
and dictated no more. And with Last Rites having been administered, he
pronounced a solemn act of faith before closing his eyes forever. On 7
March 1274, Thomas passed into eternity; at that moment, it is said,
Thomas’ old master Albert the Great tearfully declared to those around
him at Cologne, Frater Thomas de Aquino, lux Ecclesiae, hodie mortus
est— “Brother Thomas Aquinas, the light of the Church, has died this
day.”

Whether Manicheans, Muslims, Jews, or Orthodox Christians, Thomas
always supplied the most supplying answers to challengers of his Roman
Catholic faith. Today, perhaps not all will shudder hysterically at the sight
of his works as in the image above (these days, it seems only students of
theology react that way), but all who wish to rigorously engage or dispute
the truth of Catholic doctrine must at some point tackle the works of
Thomas Aquinas. For the curious skeptic as well as for the theologian,
Thomas’ works are an invaluable, exhaustive resource whose importance
to the understanding of Catholicism cannot be underestimated.

Reading his entire works is certainly not for the faint of heart, and may
even be superfluous and unnecessary for the common lay Catholic who
already believes the Church’s teaching. A layperson of simple but pious
faith need not read Thomas’ various commentaries to strengthen his or
her Christian life. So, if anyone were to ask me which passage from any of
Aquinas’ texts best encapsulates the mind of the Angelic Doctor, I would
not point him or her to the Summa Contra Gentiles, nor to the Summa
Theologica, nor to the Contra errores Graecorum, nor to the commenta-
tories on Aristotle. I would instead refer to one of the simple, elegant,
time-honored hymns which he composed for the Feast of Corpus Christi: the
hymn Adoro te devote perfectly expresses Thomas’ sincere and fervent
devotion to the Eucharistic Christ, the source and summit of all his
deavors. Let the Summas and the commentaries be consumed ut pae-
lea, as chaff, but let the hymns remain— for through them, Thomas ex-
presses that simple, obedient, childlike faith that all Christians must pos-
sess, whether a prince, a priest, or a pauper. With Thomas, may the
whole Church take these words to heart and sing them unto God:

Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,
Sed auditu solo tuto creditur.
Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius—
Nil hoc Verbo veritatis verius.

Vision, touch, and taste fail to discern Thee,
But only through hearing Thee is everything firmly believed.
I believe whatsoever the Son of God hath said—
There is nothing more true than this Word of truth.
(my translation) • J.B.
How can Catholics evangelize in a culture that calls moral convictions “hate speech” and “intolerance”? Please join us for this important day of thoughtful presentations, dialogue, and reflection.

Fr. Michael Sweeney, OP will begin our discussion by considering evangelization as an imperative for the Laity. We will hear from DSPT students about how they were evangelized and what brought them to engage the faith whole-heartedly. Fr. Justin Gable, OP will talk about the importance of mercy and our Fellows will share what evangelization looks like in areas such as business, education, and the media. This event will be live-streamed, so if you can’t attend in person, please gather your community around a TV screen and join us.

More info at dspt.edu/convocation2020.

The DSPT College of Fellows is a resource for the academic and career development of our students. They are professional women and men who engage their faith in their work in a wide range of disciplines. They shed light on contemporary issues where philosophical and theological considerations are needed. Learn more at dspt.edu/cof-members.
PRAYING WITH THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH: ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA AND THE LORD’S PRAYER

PRESENTED BY FR. MICHAEL MASCARI, OP

In his reflection on the Lord’s Prayer, St. Gregory of Nyssa’s approach to prayer remains particularly attractive for us because it reflects the concerns of Christians today, in particular the need to participate actively in the life of the world. Focused upon both the divine and the human, the spiritual and the worldly, the sacred and the secular, Gregory’s understanding of prayer is profoundly incarnational and speaks to the felt needs of men and women in every time and place.

Saturday, January 11, 7:30 pm
St. Albert’s Priory

THE CATHEDRAL SHOP

The Cathedral Shop is Not Your Usual Religious Goods Store. We are a museum-style shop with a penchant for all things Catholic. The Cathedral Shop was designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to complement the award-winning, contemporary Cathedral of Christ the Light. Visit our Shop on the Plaza or online to keep up with current book releases, trends, events.

SHOP HOURS
MONDAY-SATURDAY: 10AM TO 4 PM
SUNDAY: 9AM TO 4 PM
Around the Bay/Cathedral Mass Times

Mass For Life
at Walk for Life West Coast 2020

Alexander K. Sample,
Archbishop of Portland
Principal Co-celebrant

Saturday, January 25, 2020
9:30 AM
(before the Rally and March)

Saint Mary of the Assumption
Cathedral Parish
1111 Gough St
San Francisco, CA 94109

Liturgy & Sacraments at
The Cathedral of Christ the Light

Sunday Masses
5:30 PM  English (Saturday)
8:00 AM  Vietnamese
10:00 AM Solemn Mass
12 Noon English
2:00 PM  Spanish

Weekday Masses
Monday - Friday
7:10 AM English
12:10 PM English
Wednesday
7:00 PM Spanish
Saturday
7:30 AM Vietnamese

Reconciliation
Tuesday & Thursday
11:00 AM - 12:00 Noon

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
First Friday of the Month
11:00 AM English
7:00 PM Vietnamese

Cathedral Parish Office Hours
Monday - Friday
9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Free Guided Tours
Want to know more about the history, the art, and the architecture of the Cathedral?
Join us Monday-Friday at 1pm for free guided tours of the Cathedral of Christ the Light!