

Our first reading from the book of Wisdom seems very fitting for this Memorial of Thomas Aquinas, one of the premier Doctors of the Church who was gifted both in his abilities to learn and explain how science and faith are compatible.

I prayed, and prudence was given me;  
I pleaded, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me.  
I preferred her to scepter and throne,  
And deemed riches nothing in comparison with her,  
nor did I liken any priceless gem to her (Wis 7:7-9a).

We live in a world consumed with material wealth, yet the Book of Wisdom rightly teaches that wisdom is more precious than gold. Faith in God is more valuable than any gem no matter how exquisite its beauty nor priceless its setting.

Thomas Aquinas was born into a royal family and could easily have used wealth as a tool for his own fame and fortune. Instead, he chose the life of poverty of a Dominican friar and pursued knowledge as a path to God. Saint John Paul II said of him, “In an age when Christian thinkers were rediscovering the treasures of ancient philosophy, . . . Thomas had the great merit of giving pride of place to the harmony which exists between faith and reason. Both the light of reason and the light of faith come from God, he argued; hence there can be no contradiction between them” (Fides et Ratio #43).

Thomas saw the beauty in the pursuit of knowledge and helped us to understand that it can always be used to improve our understanding about God and divine revelation. “Faith therefore has no fear of reason but seeks it out and has trust in it. Just as grace builds on nature and brings it to fulfilment, so faith builds upon and perfects reason” (Fides et Ratio #43).

The pursuit of knowledge is not an absolute. It must be tempered by the moral compass that faith has to offer. Had Adam and Eve trusted in the limits set forward by God, they would not have eaten of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Some in science, feel that a Christian vision of the world places unnecessary restraints on science. These enlightened individuals not only reject a Christian vision of the world, but they also reject every appeal to a moral vision (Fides et Ratio #46). Thus, in the name of science:

- Doctors working for Hitler experimented on the Jewish captives in the Nazi death camps of World War II.
- US public health doctors and the Center for Disease Control conducted experiments for 40 years between 1932 and 1972 on African Americans by failing to treat their syphilis.
- In our own era, some scientists treat a fetus as less than human and therefore a tool to be used to advance scientific knowledge.

Saint Thomas Aquinas saw the value of faith and reason. God can help us to see and appreciate all ethical knowledge as it leads us back to a deeper appreciation of the master of the universe. God is the Divine Scientist who created the world and the natural laws under which it thrives and sustains humanity. “Illumined by faith, reason is set free from the fragility and limitations deriving from the disobedience of sin and finds the strength required to rise to the knowledge of the Triune God.” (Fides et Ratio 43).

Saint Thomas had a passion for the truth and may rightly be called an “apostle of the truth” (Fides et Ratio 44). He helped us to understand that faith helps us to exercise our minds to the fullest. Human reason is not restricted by acknowledging faith, rather human reason is set free to pursue knowledge to its highest and noblest ends.