

Bonaventure Talk

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PRAYER FOR THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (BONAVENTURE)

We beg the all-merciful Father through Thee,
his only-begotten Son made man for our sake,
crucified and glorified for us,
to send upon us from His treasure-house the Spirit of sevenfold grace,
Who rested upon Thee in all His fullness:

the spirit of wisdom, enabling us to relish the fruit of the tree of life, which is indeed thyself;

the gift of understanding: to enlighten our perceptions;

the gift of prudence, enabling us to follow in Thy footsteps;

the gift of strength: to withstand our adversary's onslaught;

the gift of knowledge: to distinguish good from evil by the light of Thy holy teaching;

the gift of piety: to clothe ourselves with charity and mercy;

the gift of fear: to withdraw from all ill-doing and live quietly in awe of Thy eternal majesty.

These are the things for which we petition.

Grant them for the honor of Thy Holy Name,
to which, with the Father and the Holy Ghost,
be all honor and glory, thanksgiving, renown,
and Lordship for ever and ever.

Amen.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

St. Bonaventure was born in Italy as Giovanni di Fidanza around the year 1217. He entered the new religious order founded by St. Francis of Assisi called the "Friars Minor" around the year 1243, about twenty years after Francis' death. Bonaventure studied theology under the famous Alexander of Hales and became a professor at the greatest school of theology in the medieval world, the University of Paris where **he taught alongside St. Thomas Aquinas** (Aristotilian), the "**Angelic Doctor.**" St. Bonaventure's theology is always written with holy passion, in the tradition of St. Augustine, and **always directed towards increasing the depth and intensity of the spiritual life.** Because of his burning zeal, Bonaventure became known as the "**Seraphic Doctor.**" St. Bonaventure was elected minister general of the Franciscan order in 1257 and played a prominent role in **settling the dissension that had plagued the order since the death of its founder, St. Francis.** In fact Bonaventure's Life of St. Francis was approved by the Friars Minor as the official biography of their founder. Having been created Cardinal Archbishop of Albano in 1273, **St. Bonaventure attended the Ecumenical Council of Lyon where he died in the same year that St. Thomas Aquinas died, in 1274.** As a theologian, Saint Bonaventure upheld the duty and value of using the human intellect to reflect on the mysteries of faith. But for him **all human wisdom was folly when compared to the mystical illumination given to the faithful Christian by God himself.**

NAME

An attempt has been made to trace the "Bonaventura" to the exclamation of [St. Francis](#), *O buona ventura*, when Bonaventure was brought as an infant to him to be cured of a dangerous illness. This derivation is highly improbable; it seems based on a late fifteenth-century legend. **Bonaventure himself tells us (Legenda S. Francisci Prolog.) that while yet a child he was preserved from death through the intercession of [St. Francis](#), but there is no evidence that this cure took place**

during the lifetime of **St. Francis** or that the name Bonaventure originated in any prophetic words of **St. Francis**.

THE SENTENCES

The Commentary on the "Sentences" (Peter Lombard) remains without doubt Bonaventure's greatest work; all his other writings are in some way subservient to it. It was written, at the command of his superiors, **when he was only twenty-seven and is a theological achievement of the first rank. It comprises more than four thousand pages in folio and treats extensively and profoundly of God and the Trinity, the Creation and Fall of Man, the Incarnation and Redemption, Grace, the Sacraments, and the Last Judgment, that is to say, traverses the entire field of Scholastic theology.**

The perfecting of the **soul** by the uprooting of vice and the implanting of virtue is his chief concern. There is a degree of **prayer** in which **ecstasy** occurs. When it is attained, **God** is sincerely to be thanked. It must, however, be regarded only as incidental. It is by no means essential to the possession of perfection in the highest degree.

DOCTORATE WITH AQUINAS

The degree of Doctor was **solemnly** bestowed on **St. Bonaventure** and **St. Thomas Aquinas** at the **university, 23 October, 1257.**

MINISTER GENERAL, SPIRITUALS AND RELAXATI

In the meantime Bonaventure, though not yet thirty-six years old, had on 2 February, 1257, been **elected Minister General of the Friars Minor**— an office of peculiar difficulty, owing to the fact that the order was distracted by internal dissensions between the two factions among the **Friars** designated respectively the **Spirituales** and

the *Relaxati*. The Spirituals insisted upon the literal observance of the original Rule, especially in regard to poverty, while the Relaxati wished to introduce innovations and mitigations. The Spiritual also very much wanted to leave the order go go their own way.

If anyone could have succeeded in uniting the order, it would have been Bonaventure; but the *via media* proved impracticable, and Bonaventure's personality only served to hold in check the elements of discord, subsequently represented by the **Conventuals** and the Fraticelli (extreme).

First Encyclical to the Order, 23 April 1257

A final piece of evidence that relates to the order's good reputation by living the Rule comes from Bonaventure's *First Encyclical Letter* (23 April 1257). Therein, Bonaventure identifies ten abuses confronting the order. Seven specifically deal with poverty: handling of money, seeking bodily comforts, pushy begging, lavish buildings, aggressive acquisition of burial fees and legacies, expensive changes of brothers' residences, and excessive general expenses. The other three concern idleness, familiarities with women, and imprudent assignment of ministerial offices (i.e., preaching and confession). Many of these abuses reflect the accusations hurled at the Franciscans by the seculars. Hence, Bonaventure recognizes that, "the dangers still threatening our Order, the wounds being inflicted on the consciences of many brothers, not to mention the scandals being given to secular persons, for whom our Order, which ought to be a shining mirror of sanctity, has become in many parts of the world an object of loathing and contempt."¹⁴¹ In keeping with the mirror imagery, Bonaventure explains that the reputation of the order has been tarnished from without by scandals and tainted from within by dimmed consciences. Bonaventure's solution to the ten problems is singular: follow the Rule. Adherence to the Rule will bring two reciprocal outcomes: avoiding scandal and attaining salvation.¹⁴²

HARSHNESS TOWARD HERETICS

The new general lost no time in striking vigorously at both extremes within the order. On the one hand, he proceeded against several of the **Joachimite "Spirituals"** as **heretics** before an **ecclesiastical tribunal** at **Città della Pieve**; two of their leaders were condemned to perpetual **imprisonment**, and **John of Parma** was only saved from a like fate through the personal intervention of **Cardinal Ottoboni**, afterwards **Adrian V.**

CARDINAL'S HAT

On 23 June, 1273, Bonaventure, much against his will, was created **Cardinal-Bishop of Albano**, by **Gregory X.** It is said that the **pope's** envoys who brought him the **cardinal's** hat found the **saint** washing dishes outside a **convent** near Florence and were requested by him to hang it on a tree nearby until his hands were free to take it.

FOURTEENTH OECUMENICAL COUNCIL and DEATH

Bonaventure had been charged by **Gregory X** to prepare the questions to be discussed at the **Fourteenth Oecumenical Council**, which opened at **Lyons 7 May, 1274.**

The **pope** himself presided at the council, but he confided the direction of its deliberations to Bonaventure, especially charging him to confer with the Greeks on the points relating to the **abjuration** of their **schism.** It was largely due to Bonaventure's efforts and to those of the **Friars** whom he had sent to Constantinople, that the Greeks accepted the union effected 6 July, 1274. Bonaventure twice addressed the assembled Fathers, on 18 May, during a session of the Council, when he preached on Baruch 5:5, and on 29 June, during **pontifical Mass** celebrated by the **pope.**

While the council was still in session, Bonaventure died, Sunday, 15 July, 1274. (Aquinas - March 7, 1274) The exact cause of his death is unknown, but if we may credit the chronicle of Peregrinus of Bologna, Bonaventure's secretary, which has recently (1905) been recovered and edited, the saint was poisoned.

CANONIZATION

When, in 1434, Bonaventure's remains were translated to the new church erected at Lyons in honour of St. Francis, his head was found in a perfect state of preservation, the tongue being as red as in life. This miracle not only moved the people of Lyons to choose Bonaventure as their special patron, but also gave a great impetus to the process of his canonization. Dante, writing long before, had given expression to the popular mind by placing Bonaventure among the saints in his "Paradiso", and no canonization was ever more ardently or universally desired than that of Bonaventure. **Bonaventure united in himself the two elements whence proceed whatever was noble and sublime, great and beautiful, tender piety and profound learning.**

Key Bible Passage for Understanding Boneventure

...for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1: 16-17)

HOW ARE THESE PRAYERS CRITICALLY DIFFERENT?

Anima Christi (Ancient)

SOUL of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within Thy wounds, hide me.
Separated from Thee let me never be.
From the malignant enemy, defend me.
At the hour of death, call me.
To come to Thee, bid me,
That I may praise Thee in the company
Of Thy Saints, for all eternity.

Vs.

A Modern Prayer

God's Love is inside me...
God's Grace surrounds me...
I am Loving Awareness

I let go of pain, sadness, fear, & anger, by opening my heart to others allowing God's Love and Grace to flow through me.

"META"-PHILOSOPHY

"To him, the purely intellectual element, though never absent, is of inferior interest when compared with the living power of the affections or the heart."

The supreme end of life is such union, union in [contemplation](#) or intellect and in intense absorbing [love](#); but it cannot be entirely reached in this life, and remains as a [hope](#) for the future.

In form and intent the work of St. Bonaventure is always the work of a theologian; he writes as one for whom **the only angle of vision and the proximate criterion of truth is the Christian faith.**

AQUINAS VS. BONAVENTURE

The first difference has to do with their concept of theology. Both of these doctors of the Church raised the question as to whether theology is a "practical" discipline (i.e. for guiding human action) or a theoretical, speculative discipline.

The conclusion that St. Thomas reached is that theology entails both aspects. It is theoretical because it seeks an ever-greater knowledge of God, and it is practical because it seeks to orient our lives towards goodness. But knowledge has primacy (Aristotle): We first have to know God before we act in a godly way (Summa Theologiae Ia, q. 1, art. 4). **This primacy of knowledge over praxis is significant in St. Thomas' fundamental approach.**

St. Bonaventure's answer was very similar, but with a different emphasis. He was familiar with the arguments of both sides, as St. Thomas was. [Bonaventure] goes on to say that wisdom seeks contemplation (the highest form of knowledge) and has as its intention that we should become good above all.

"Faith," he adds, "is in the intellect in such a way that it causes affection.

Reason, it was said, drains away faith and does violence to God's word. We should listen to God's word rather than dissecting it (see St. Francis of Assisi's Letter to St. Anthony of Padua).

In response to these arguments against theology, which show the perils that exist in theology itself, Bonaventure says that it is true that there is an arrogant way of engaging in theology — a pridefulness that places reason above God's word.

But true theology, the reasoned work of true and good theology, has a different origin and is not born from rational pridefulness. He who loves always desires to know his beloved deeper and better. True theology is not spurred on in its study by pride. It is motivated by love of him to whom it has given its assent and the desire to better know the beloved.

THOMAS' VS. BONAVENTURE'S SUPREME GOAL

To See God vs. To Love God

For St. Thomas, the supreme goal towards which our desire is oriented is to see God. In this simple act of seeing God, all problems find their solution. We are happy; nothing else is necessary.

For St. Bonaventure, on the other hand, man's ultimate destiny is to love God — the encounter and the union of his love and ours. For him, this is the most adequate definition of our happiness.

Truth vs. Goodness

Along the same lines, we might say that the highest category for St. Thomas is truth, whereas for St. Bonaventure it is goodness. Yet, it would be wrong to see a contradiction between these two positions.

St. Francis of Assisi, above and beyond the intellectual debates of his time, showed the primacy of love with his entire life. He was a living icon, enamored of the Lord, who made the figure of Christ present in his time. He convinced his contemporaries not with words but by his life.

But in order to comprehend how this theme of the “primacy of love” was developed in a concrete way, we have to keep in mind yet another source: the writings of the so-called Pseudo-Dionysius, a Syrian theologian of the sixth century who used the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite, referring to a figure in the Acts of the Apostles (see 17:34).

While for St. Augustine, seeing with the mind and the heart is the ultimate category of knowledge, **Pseudo-Dionysius** took it one step further. In the ascent toward God, it is possible to reach a point in which reason can no longer see. But in the night of the intellect, love still sees: It can see what remains inaccessible to reason.

Love goes beyond reason; it sees better and enters more deeply into the mystery of God. St. Bonaventure was captivated by this vision, which corresponded to his Franciscan spirituality.

Precisely in the dark night of the cross, the grandeur of divine love appears. Where reason no longer sees, love does.

This approach is not anti-intellectual or antirational; it implies the path of reason but transcends it in the love of the crucified Christ.

BONAVENTURE AND CREATION

St. Bonaventure also shares with St. Francis a love for creation, a joy in the beauty of God’s creation.

“He ... who does not see the innumerable splendors of creation is blind. He who is not awakened by its many voices is deaf. He who does not praise God for all these wonders is mute. He who, from so many signs, does not exalt the first principle is foolish”

For St. Bonaventure, therefore, all our life is a “journey,” a pilgrimage, an ascent towards God. But we cannot ascend to God’s heights through our own efforts. God himself must help us. He must “pull us up.”

That is why prayer is necessary. Prayer, St. Bonaventure says, is the mother and origin of this elevation.

WRAPPING UP

Anima Christi

SOUL of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within Thy wounds, hide me.
Separated from Thee let me never be.
From the malignant enemy, defend me.
At the hour of death, call me.
To come to Thee, bid me,
That I may praise Thee in the company
Of Thy Saints, for all eternity.

Vs.

A Modern Prayer

God’s Love is inside me...
God’s Grace surrounds me...
I am Loving Awareness

I let go of pain, sadness, fear, & anger, by opening my heart to others allowing God’s Love and Grace to flow through me

CRITICAL DISTINCTION

The critical distinction that Bonaventure brings to us is exemplified in these two prayers. We can trace this distinction back to Bonaventure and Aquinas.

In short, Aquinas, who adopted, interpreted, purified, and baptized Aristotle promoted the idea that creation could be understood in itself, on its own terms. Bonaventure held that anything that can be understood, including creation, can be understood only through and in Christ.

The problem with Aquinas is that it arguably can lead us to a Godless view of life.

PRAYER OF ST. BONAVENTURE

Pierce, O most sweet Lord Jesus, my inmost soul with the most joyous and healthful wound of Thy love, and with true, calm and most holy apostolic charity, that my soul may ever languish and melt with entire love and longing for Thee, may yearn for Thee and for thy courts, may long to be dissolved and to be with Thee.

Grant that my soul may hunger after Thee, the Bread of Angels, the refreshment of holy souls, our daily and super substantial bread, having all sweetness and savor and every delightful taste.

May my heart ever hunger after and feed upon Thee, Whom the angels desire to look upon, and may my inmost soul be filled with the sweetness of Thy savor; may it ever thirst for Thee, the fountain of life, the fountain of wisdom and knowledge, the fountain of eternal light, the torrent of pleasure, the fullness of the house of God; may it ever compass Thee, seek Thee, find Thee, run to Thee, come up to Thee, meditate on Thee, speak of Thee, and do all for the praise and glory of Thy name, with humility and discretion, with love and delight, with ease and affection, with perseverance to the end; and be Thou alone ever my hope, my entire confidence, my riches, my delight, my pleasure, my joy, my rest and tranquility, my peace, my sweetness, my food, my refreshment, my refuge, my help, my wisdom, my portion, my possession, my treasure; in Whom may my mind and my heart be ever fixed and firm and rooted immovably. Amen.

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