

March 7

ON SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

108.1 First Point

Saint Thomas was one of the greatest Doctors of the Church, and he enlightened it by the quite extraordinary and almost miraculous learning God gave him. This saint studied as much at the foot of the crucifix as he did in books; because he excelled so greatly in the science of theology, he is considered the Angel of this sacred school, surpassing all other theologians. In all the difficulties he met while studying or writing, he had recourse to prayer, and when this did not suffice to give him an understanding of what he wanted to know, he added fasting. It was by these two means that he acquired such great knowledge and became a miracle of learning.

It is true that what you need to learn are the ordinary things about religion and salvation. Still, it will be difficult for you to possess them perfectly unless you employ the three means Saint Thomas used to become learned; I mean books, prayer, and mortification. It is by these three means that God wishes you to instruct yourselves in your state about what you need to know and teach others.

108.2 Second Point

In all his studies and all his writings, Saint Thomas had no other purpose than the glory of God and the building of the Church. It was because of this that he merited to have Jesus Christ give him this praise: Thomas, you have written well of me; what reward do you wish me to give you for the great good you have done for the Church? But this saint had worked with such great disinterestedness for the good of the faithful, especially those who have to teach others, that he made no other reply than this, that he wanted no other recompense than God himself.

Your profession commits you to teach children the science of salvation, and you are bound to do this with total disinterestedness. Do you do this with the sole view of procuring the glory of God and your neighbor's salvation? Declare to God that you will never have any other intention than that.

108.3 Third Point

This saint, who had such eminent knowledge, excelled so much in the virtue of humility that he refused all the honors of the Church that were offered to him, and he looked upon himself as the least among his Brothers. As a result, in spite of his great activity, he served them as a companion.

Although his learning won him great renown and caused him to be looked up to and honored by the whole world, he managed not to draw attention to himself outside his community. His whole aim in study was to use his learning serve the purpose proper to it, for which God asked him to labor and study.

The admirable thing is that, although so learned, he had no desire to be esteemed by others, and this led him often to thank God that he had never had any thought of vanity which would make him deserving of blame. Ah! how rare it is to find a man who excels in anything, who does not on that account have a higher opinion of himself!

Try to share in this saint's humility, since you have nothing in you save what is lowly and humbling. To acquire this virtue, love humiliations a great deal, for they are the means, and the most apt, to procure it.

Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274) was born in the castle of Rocca Secca near Naples and began his education at the nearby abbey of Monte Casino, then later attended the University of Naples. His decision to become a Dominican, then an Order not yet 30 years old, shocked his noble family, and he was kidnapped by his brothers and tempted to violate his chastity. However, he escaped and continued his studies as a Dominican under Saint Albert at Cologne and with Saint Bonaventure in Paris, where he also taught philosophy and theology. His *Summa Theologica*, published after his death along with his other writings in 17 volumes, earned him the title Doctor of the Church in 1567. Pope Leo XIII declared him the patron of all Catholic schools. He died on March 7, but his feast is now celebrated on January 28, the day his body was transferred to Toulouse in 1369.