

## Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

**Grant me grace, O Merciful God,  
to desire ardently all that is pleasing to Thee,  
to examine it prudently,  
to acknowledge it truthfully,  
and to accomplish it perfectly  
for the praise and glory of Thy Name. Amen.**

## Lesson 3: "God's Innermost Secret" CCC 185-267 (268-278):

**Last sessions:** THAT we are on a Journey from Blessing to Blessing + the vehicles of revelation that describe for us the Plan of that Journey. **NOW: The Content of the Plan.**

### **The Creed, the symbol of our faith, the Journey outlined**

*Credo* = "I believe"

- 1) The Story of Salvation in miniature, a *regula fidei* ("Rule (canon) of Faith")
- 2) The witness or attestation or mark of those who belong, those who recognize Reality the same way: a symbol or seal (Greek = *symbolon*) of recognition

#### **The main Creeds:**

1. Apostles' Creed (Symbol of the Apostles) made up of twelve articles (key formulations)
2. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan (Nicene) Creed from the first two great ecumenical councils in 325 (Nicaea I) and in 381 (Constantinople I)
3. The "Athanasian Creed" (*Quicumque Vult*) (early 5<sup>th</sup> century)

#### **A tripartite (Trinitarian) structure:**

- God the Father's action in creation
- God the Son's action in redemption
- God the Holy Spirit's action in sanctification through the *communio* of the Church unto the end

#### **God Three in One, One in Three is about doing something; we respond "Amen."**

READ CCC 197.

"We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch....All the same, we do approach these realities with the help of formulations of the faith which permit us to express the faith and to hand it on, to celebrate it in community, to assimilate and live on it more and more." CCC 170

**A little bit on Faith and Reason, on Zechariah and Mary, and on why knowing is so important for loving...**

**Diagram #1: Reason moves from understanding to judgment / assent (natural belief).**

"Is it so?" => Given the observations, evidence, logic, historical data, it seems so.

Cf. CCC 36 and fn. 11 *Dei Filius*, 2

**Diagram #2: Faith judges / assents based on the authority of the witness (God) and then moves toward understanding.**

"It is so" => What is it that is so? How so? In what manner so? What of it?

Cf. "Ten thousand difficulties [of understanding] do not make one doubt [of faith]" John Henry Newman, cited in CCC 157.

**Diagram #3: Faith + Reason are the two wings by which we rise to the Truth.**

Faith (a Gift of God's Self-Disclosure, Revelation) orders, perfects, and raises reason to new horizons; illuminated reason in turn enables us to penetrate more deeply into the Mystery, the Revelation of God, God's *Theo-Logos*.

Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 1998

**Zechariah's posture:** "How can this be?" => "I don't understand, and so I cannot assent." (God then disciplines him so as to orient his *willingness* to say "yes").

**Mary's posture:** "How can this be?" => "I am saying "Fiat!", and so I seek to understand." (God then invites her into contemplation, into gazing on the Face, into the Heart of Suffering so as to allow her to penetrate the Mystery).

*Credo ut intelligam* "I believe so that I may understand" (St. Anselm, †1109), after St. Augustine: "I believe in order to understand; I understand, the better to believe" (cf. CCC 158)

**Theology** *df* = *Fides quarrens intellectum* = "faith seeking understanding"

**Faith** *df* = READ CCC 150, 155, 156. *A willed assent to The Truth* (a Person) that gives birth to hope and love: union with Him now and fully fulfilled in the end.

*Fides quae* = The faith which we know... (train the intellect)

*Fides qua* = The faith, *by which* we know... (pray for the Gift, and exercise the will)

Two temptations / pitfalls:

1. To stop at the intellect alone, the propositions, the *fides quae* (academic theology).  
But one can *know* abstractly without loving...
2. To think that ignorance is bliss: "All you need is love..." But ignorant love is stunted love, and stunted love narrows into error and, eventually, into loving something else.  
The *fides qua* wanders...

Our call: to put *fides qua* in the *fides quae* so as to meet HIM!

### **The Catholic Principle:**

#### **WE LOVE WHAT WE KNOW; WE SEEK TO KNOW THE ONE WE LOVE.**

Jesus: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21).

Paul: "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds..." (Rom. 12:2); "Set your minds on things above...(Col 3:2).

Peter: "Gird up the loins of your mind, prepare your minds for action..." (I Pet 1:13).

**Why? So as to SEE MORE CLEARLY and to LOVE MORE TRULY.**

**Aim: to see as God sees, *in conspectu Dei*. Ultimately, to SEE GOD.**

"To see is to possess....Whoever sees God has obtained all the goods of which he can conceive" (St. Gregory of Nyssa, †c.395. cf. CCC 2548)

"God himself will be the goal of our desires; we shall contemplate him without end, love him without surfeit, praise him without weariness. This gift, this state, this act, like eternal life itself, will assuredly be common to all" (St. Augustine, † 430. cf. CCC 2550)

"Look,  
to see,  
to remember,  
to enjoy"

-- Mr. Fitzpatrick of Pittsburgh

"Come Lord, stir us up and call us back, kindle and seize us, be our fire and our sweetness. Let us love, let us run."

-- St. Augustine, Confessions VIII.iv(9)

## MAIN TALK: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth..."

### The Method for arriving at the assertions in the Creed:

Given that we are made in the *Imago Dei* and are therefore *capax Dei* (though fallen)...

...In light of **GOD's** personal Self-disclosure (*Theo-logos*) over time and in space through concrete words (Word) and deeds ("God saves") to form a people of His own through a redeeming Covenant...

...and in light of reflecting back on God's centuries-long pedagogy to prepare us for "the fullness of time" when the **SON** comes "who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp [icon, image] of his nature, upholding the universe with his word of power, and having made purification for sins" (Hebrews 1:3) (the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery)...

...all under the pedagogy of the **HOLY SPIRIT** "who will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26) (the Spirit in the Communion of the Church)...

...not only does the PLAN unfold...

...but by grace- & faith-illuminated reason gazing in love on **LOVE HIMSELF** (*fides quarrens intellectum*)...

...over time we can make some genuinely accurate (intelligible) if not sufficient (not comprehensible) declarations about **THE ONE WHO LOVES** ("Aha! God's Inner Secret")...and how He loves, why He loves, whom He loves, to what end He loves. (Cf. CCC 39-43 We speak of God's Inner Secret by way of analogy: the similitude between perfections of creatures and the source of the perfections; analogy is limited but accurate: God IS this...and he is more).

**We are raised up and invited back in to Blessing, Beatitude, Happiness, Possession: a Marriage of Self-giving love with Love Himself.** This is the JOURNEY.

**"We only love what we know, and we seek to know the One we love."**

The Catechism is therefore giving us SUMMARY statements, descriptions, data that can be difficult to grasp—especially as the Queen of Sciences (theology) seeks the aid of theology's handmaid, philosophy. But the Catechism itself keeps inviting us further in: "Don't lose the forest for the trees!"

**An invitation** not simply to *imagine* God (for imagining is necessarily quite limited)...

...nor only to speculate on God by *exercise of intellect* (though the intellect carries us much further than imagination)...

But **to gaze on the Face**: a turning to the Real, a *contemplatio* of Who He Is, a Kiss of the Divine. (cf. Song of Songs 1:2)

cf. CCC 260 **"The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity."**

## "I believe in God the Father": KEY affirmations

1. **GOD REVEALS HIS NAME: "I AM WHO AM" "I AM HE WHO IS" "I AM WHAT I AM"**  
 ... **"the goodness: merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"** (Exodus 3:13-15; 33:18-19; 34:5-6, 9.) CCC 203-211

- A name is *person-al*
- A name reveals His *character* (the kind of Person)
- A name reveals His *intent toward* (of all things!) a people—us!
- The name (confirmed by the character known by words and deeds) eventually reveals the inner Life, i.e., the "who / what God is" is only first known by the way in which He works and we first perceive Him over the course of time

- n.b. on the Divine Name not being pronounced (CCC 209), therefore LORD (*Adonai* (Hebrew) or *Kyrios* (Greek) or *Dominus* (Latin))

A distinction:

**Theologia (theology)** = transcendent inner Life & Mystery of Who God Is

**Oikonomia (economy)** = the concrete words and deeds by which God reveals Himself and communicates His Life in space and time

The economy reveals the theology, but the theology determines the economy.

In the order of *knowing* (*how* we know), the words, deeds, actions of God come first.  
 In the order of *being* (*that which* we know), the inner Life & Mystery comes first.

From our perspective, **economy is first in the order of knowing; but theology is first in order of being**. That is, our perception of the Plan first reveals the Designer of the Plan, but the Designer first determines the Plan revealed; moreover, the more we come to understand the Designer in Himself (His inner Life & Mystery), the more the Plan makes sense.

**CCC 236.** cf. 257-260, 53, 56, 66, 122, 684 on the economy, the Divine pedagogy, the gradual unfolding of the plan

2. **GOD IS, GOD IS ONE, I believe in ONE God**

CCC 200-202

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." [the *Shema*, Deut 6:4-5]

3. **GOD IS TRUTH & LOVE toward His people: The Blessed One is blessing**

CCC 214-221

This is the Great Story (plan, Divine pedagogy) and experience of the Old Covenant that in turn prepares us for...

**4. In the "fullness of time" the ONE GOD, THE BLESSED ONE, GOD ALONE, who is Truth and Love, is revealed to be FATHER...**

through the presence, words, deeds of the SON...

by the infusion, witness, movement of the HOLY SPIRIT...

...who together confirm more deeply still that the One God, GOD ALONE, is Truth and Love **intending to draw His people into His very Inner Life.**

**THE LORD TRULY IS LOVE: FATHER, SON, SPIRIT** (All three are LORD; THE LORD is all Three)

**CCC 221, 234, 258 THE CENTRAL MYSTERY OF THE FAITH**

n.b. on "mystery" as a Reality too Great to grasp fully even as we can approach

***THAT*** "God is One / The One God is Father, Son, Spirit" is **first affirmed**;  
***HOW*** "God is One / The One God is Father, Son, Spirit" is **later understood**.

**THAT** "God is One / The One God is Father, Son, Spirit" is **first affirmed**:

- in Jesus' teaching (cf. especially Gospel of John; Matt. 28:19)
- in Liturgy (doxology "Glory be..." from the very beginning; baptismal formula "In the *name* of..."; the entire structure of the liturgy)
- in the Kerygma (cf. Acts of Apostles, letters of Paul, Peter, John; earliest Church writings)
- in the Universal experience (cf. Luke 1-2; Acts of Apostles ("the Acts of the Holy Spirit"))

**KEY (the point of CCC 234):** Apart from the fullness of Revelation of the Face of God in the SON (only "seen" by virtue of the inner working of the HOLY SPIRIT), the true FATHERHOOD of God *cannot be known truly or approached*.

Cf. John 1:1-18; John 7:37-39; John 12-13, 14-17 last discourse & High Priestly prayer of Jesus; Col. 1:15-20; Heb: 1:1-4

Cf. CCC 238-246, 292 & 689-690 on the Son and Spirit as the "two hands of God" (St. Irenaeus † c.200), 683-686 on the Divine pedagogy & effacement by the Holy Spirit

**And "Father, Son, Holy Spirit" is affirmed so that we might KNOW & therefore LOVE truly ("we love what we know and seek to know the One we love"):**

Joseph Ratzinger:

"How, then, do we know that fatherhood is a kindness on which we can rely and that God, despite all outward appearances, is not playing with the world, but loves it dependably? For this, it was necessary that God should show himself, overthrow the images, and set up a new criterion. This takes place in the Son, in Christ. **In his prayer**, he plunges the totality of his life into the abyss of truth and goodness that is God. **It is only on the basis of this Son that we truly experience what God is**....The biblical Father is not a heavenly duplicate of human fatherhood. Rather, he posits something new: he is the divine critique of human fatherhood. God establishes his own criterion.

**Without Jesus, we do not know what 'Father' truly is.** This becomes visible in his prayer, which is the foundation of his being....Jesus shows us what it means to lead the whole of one's life on the basis of the affirmation that 'God is.'...**Becoming a Christian means sharing in Jesus' prayer**, entering into the model provided by his life, that is, the model of his prayer. **Becoming a Christian means saying 'Father' with Jesus and, thus, becoming a child, God's son—God—in the unity of the Spirit**, who allows us to be ourselves and precisely in this way draws us into the unity of God....**[Christian] existence is belief in his love and faith that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—for it is only thus that the affirmation that he is 'love' becomes meaningful.**

--Joseph Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008 [German original 1976], 33-37.

**HOW "God is One / The One God is Father, Son, Spirit" is later understood.**  
 (*fides quarrens intellectum*) CCC 212-213, 249-255

- Understanding is deepened by use and by the need to steer a course between errors; errors are a concern because LOVE is at stake: the Journey of Salvation.

**The basic "formula" expressing the Mystery =**  
**One-ness of nature ("what God is"), Three-ness of persons ("who God is")**

One simple Divine Nature, two processions, three Persons ("subsistent relations"), four relations ("notional actions") + four properties, five characteristics ("notional properties")...

**1. God is One; the Trinity is One = nature / essence / substance = "WHAT God is"**

CCC 202 "We firmly believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God, eternal infinite (*immensus*) and unchangeable, incomprehensible, almighty and ineffable, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; three persons indeed, but **one essence, substance or nature entirely simple.**" *Lateran Council IV* (1215)

CCC 253 *The Trinity is One.* We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the "consubstantial Trinity". The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire: "The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which the Holy Spirit is, i.e. by nature one God." In the words of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), "Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature."

The Key intellectual move: The Son is ***homo-ousios*** = **consubstantial** = **of the same substance** (by generation, not creation) as the Father. (Cf. CCC 465)

CCC 242 Following this apostolic tradition, the Church confessed at the first ecumenical council at Nicaea (325) that the Son is "consubstantial" with the Father, that is, one only God with him. The second ecumenical council, held at Constantinople in 381, kept this expression in its formulation of the Nicene Creed and confessed "the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father".

**= "WHO" God is**

**2. The Divine Persons are really distinct from one another = "person" / *hypostasis* / **subsistent relation; there are Three** (must be three and can be no more than three). They are NOT modes or dimensions or appearances or activities; they are **DISTINCT PERSONS**.**

**Father = unbegotten** (*aggenitos*) / eternally begets, generates.

**Son = begotten**, generated / is eternally begotten ***by way of knowledge***.

**Spirit = proceeding** (is *spirated*) / eternally **proceeds** (is spirated from) from ***by way of love***.

*But that which is begotten is entirely of and is the entirety of the Father; that which proceeds is entirely of and is the entirety of the Father (and the Son); therefore, one nature, essence, substance. The Persons are distinct but not separate. And remember: no time here—it is an eternal dynamic without limit in space or time. (Space and time are non-categories here).*

Some grand analogies: Thinker ("Idea-er")-Thought (Idea)-Love      Intellect-Word-Breath  
 Existence- Knowledge-Lovingness                      Lover-Beloved-Love  
 Source-Ray-Warmth

Because they are distinct persons, we can speak of personal characteristics (Fatherhood, Sonship, Procession) and of some additional notions (Unbegotten-ness, Spiration) and even of *appropriated* activities (creation, redemption, sanctification) to the Persons. But because God is ONE essence / nature / substance (Divine), **in the divine economy, there is only ONE principle of operation; they work always in concert, and all / each is involved in creation, redemption, sanctification. The Plan and the Journey is the work of all in communion...**

### 3. **The Divine Persons are relative to (in relation to) one another:**

**God IS a dynamic communion of Love, a Circuminsession / Circumincession / perichoresis of total Self-Gift.** They are in four real relations: paternity (Father), filiation (Son), and passive spiration (Spirit) and active spiration (Father + Son); they ARE three "**subsistent relations**". They are each and wholly God and they are each and wholly in one another even as they are **distinct by relation** from & to one another.

### **SUMMARY: (see also HANDOUT "SUMMARY REVIEW")**

ONE in **nature** / essence / substance = existence itself (the "most essence" possible)

THREE **persons** / *hypostatis* / real (subsistent) relations = therefore, a refulgent, dynamic, communion of being: **Father, Son, Holy Spirit = LOVE**

**"God is more perfectly known than he can be described, and he exists more perfectly than he is known."**

St. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, VII.4.7

The Hymn in the Anaphora of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom:

**Priest:** It is proper and right to sing to You, bless You, praise You, thank You and worship You in all places of Your dominion; for You are God ineffable, beyond comprehension, invisible, beyond understanding, existing forever and always the same; You and Your only begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit. You brought us into being out of nothing, and when we fell, You raised us up again. You did not cease doing everything until You led us to heaven and granted us Your kingdom to come. For all these things we thank You and Your only begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit; for all things that we know and do not know, for blessings seen and unseen that have been bestowed upon us. We also thank You for this liturgy which You are pleased to accept from our hands, even though You are surrounded by thousands of Archangels and tens of thousands of Angels, by the Cherubim and Seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring with their wings, Singing the victory hymn, proclaiming, crying out, and saying:

**People:** *Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with Your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to God in the highest.*

### **Hints for maturing one's faith and for prayer**

(entering by the Holy Spirit into the Divine Discourse of Jesus with the Father):

- CCC 222-227
- CCC 256, 257-260 "God is love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **God freely wills to communicate the glory of his blessed life....The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity.**"