

# Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas 2015

## Introduction

I am happy to return to Mount De Sales not only for Catholic Schools Week but also to celebrate with you the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, the great Dominican priest and theologian, arguably the greatest theologian in the history of the Church. So to Sister Mary Thomas, the Dominican Sisters, to the faculty and administration of Mt. De Sales and to you the students, happy feast day!

Let me tell you a little about his life and his work and then let's try to see what this great saint may have to say to you and me.

## A Sketch of His Life

St. Thomas was born in 1225, in the 13th century into a Noble family. His hometown was a place called Rocca Secca, located in what is today central Italy. It was not far from the historic Benedictine Abbey of Monte Casino. In fact, his well-to-do family wanted him to enter the Benedictine Order, convinced he would have a brilliant career. Instead, this gifted young man decided to enter the Order of Preachers, commonly known as the Dominican Order.

By all accounts, Thomas did not flaunt his brilliance. In fact, he was so quiet that some concluded that he was not very bright. Thankfully his superiors did not reach that conclusion so they sent him to study under the great Dominican thinker, St. Albert the Great, and then to the great University of Paris. And from 1257, when he completed his studies, until his death in 1274, St. Thomas Aquinas devoted himself to teaching and writing. leaving behind an amazing number of writings that today are still intensely studied.

Long before there was an internet, St. Thomas Aquinas had a memory that functioned a lot like the internet, (except that it was more accurate and there were no pop up ads). He knew the Scriptures backwards and forwards and the writings of the ancient philosophers and contemporary Arabic philosophers, and he knew cite from memory the writings of theologians and saints from the earliest days of the Church right up to his own day. What's more, he didn't use a quill pen to write down his thoughts - instead, after intense prayer, he would dictate his writings to his

assistants who had a challenging job of trying to keep up with him.

St. Thomas is remembered for making use of Aristotle's philosophy to help clarify and show the unity of all the Church believes and teaches. He was a powerful and original thinker who continues to show us our human minds can attain truth. He showed us that love is at the heart of the Church's moral teaching not only by what he wrote but also by his kindness toward those who opposed him and by his peaceful spirit which impressed everyone who came into contact with him. Centuries after his death, he remains a towering figure, someone who can't be ignored by anyone who seriously studies theology. You might say he was and is a super-star, a celebrity, in the world of theology.

### **St. Thomas' Wisdom and Humility**

Clearly, St. Thomas was more than a brilliant writer. He was a wise and holy man, kind toward all, and a lover of peace. Many of his writings show his intense love of Jesus, his devotion to Mary, and above all, his love for Christ truly present in the Eucharist. He was a man of prayer, not just ordinary prayer, but of deep and mystical prayer, and many of his most brilliant writings were dictated when he was deep in prayer. Jesus was his teacher and the model for his whole life.

The first reading says, "I prayed and prudence was given me; I pleaded and the Spirit of Wisdom came to me." St. Thomas did just that, and as a result, he was both smart and wise. He used his tremendous intellectual gifts to seek the Wisdom of God. More than anything else, he wanted to know and love what God himself knows and loves and has revealed to us through His Son Jesus. Simply put, he loved wisdom; he loved charity; and he loved peace.

### **St. Thomas and Ourselves**

How can a saint who lived so long ago influence your life right now? If St. Thomas were standing here instead of me, what would he say to you? I can't be sure but I'd suggest he might say something like this:

First, he would tell you to pray every day, to read and love Scripture, to be attentive at Mass, to love Jesus really present in the Eucharist and to make him the model of your lives.

Second, study hard. Develop your intellectual gifts. Be lovers of knowledge and truth. Have confidence that your mind has a great capacity for truth, not just the truth you can see and measure but the deeper truths that guide our lives and lead us toward God.

Third, he'd tell you to know and love the faith of the Church, he tell you to read Scripture and to study the Church's teachings, and more than that to learn how to explain what the Church believes in language that people in our day can understand and accept.

Fourth, he'd show you how the Church's moral teaching isn't just a bunch of rules. Rather, it is a sure guide for loving God above all and our neighbor as ourselves. It is a way of living our lives truthfully, lovingly, at peace with God & those around us.

And finally, I think this great saint would be delighted to you, centuries later, receiving such a wonderful formation under the guidance of the Dominican Sisters, and preparing to live your lives as followers of Christ & members of His Church. In fact, this great saint IS delighted to see you and is praying with us and for us. So we can conclude, St. Thomas Aquinas, pray for us!