

MARCH VII. ST. THOMAS OF AQUINO
DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH AND CONFESSOR

From his life, written by Bartholomew of Lucca, some time the saint's confessor: also another life, compiled for his canonisation by William of Tocco, prior of Benevento, who had been personally acquainted with the saint, &c. See F. Tournon, in his life of St. Thomas, in quarto, Paris, 1737.

A.D. 1274.

The counts of Aquino, who have flourished in the kingdom of Naples these last ten centuries, derive their pedigree from a certain Lombard prince. They were allied to the kings of Sicily and Aragon, to St. Lewis of France, and many other sovereign houses of Europe. Our saint's grandfather having married the sister of the emperor Frederick I. he was himself grand nephew to that prince, and second cousin to the emperor Henry VI. and in the third degree to Frederick II.¹ His father, Landulph, was count of Aquino, and lord of Loretto and Belcastro: his mother Theodora was daughter to the count of Theate. The saint was born towards the end of the year 1226. St. Austin observes,² that the most tender age is subject to various passions, as of impatience, choler, jealousy, spite, and the like, which appear in children: no such thing was seen in Thomas. The serenity of his countenance, the constant evenness of his temper, his modesty and sweetness, were sensible marks that God prevented him with his early graces. The count of Aquino conducted him to the abbey of Mount Cassino, when he was but five years old, to be instructed by those good monks in the first principles of religion and learning; and his tutors soon saw with joy the rapidity of his progress, his great talents, and his happy dispositions to virtue. He was but ten years of age when the abbot told his father that it was time to send him to some university. The count, before he sent him to Naples, took him for some months to see his mother at his seat at Loretto, the place which about the end of that century grew famous for devotion to our Lady. Thomas was the admiration of the whole family. Amidst so much company, and so many servants, he appeared always as much recollected, and occupied on God, as he had been in the monastery; he spoke little, and always to the purpose; and he employed all his time in prayer, or serious and profitable exercises. His great delight seemed to be to intercede for, and to distribute, his parents' plentiful alms among the poor at the gate, whom he studied by a hundred ingenious contrivances to relieve. He robbed himself of his own victuals for that purpose; which his father having discovered, he gave him leave to distribute things at discretion, which liberty he made good use of for the little time he stayed. The countess apprehensive of the dangers her son's innocence might be exposed to in an academy, desired that he should perform his studies with a private preceptor under her own eyes; but the father knowing the great advantages of emulation and mutual communication in studies, was determined to send him to Naples, where the emperor Frederick II. being exasperated against Bologna, had lately, in 1224, erected a university, forbidding students to resort to any other in Italy. This immediately drew thither great numbers of students, and with them disorder and licentiousness, like that described by St. Austin in the great schools of Carthage.³ Thomas soon perceived the dangers, and regretted the sanctuary of Mount Cassino; but by his extraordinary watchfulness, he lived here like the young Daniel in the midst of Babylon, or Toby in the infidel Ninive. He guarded his eyes with an extreme caution, shunned entirely all conversation with

¹ St. Thomas was born at Belcastro: on his ancient illustrious pedigree and its branches, which still flourish in Calabria, see Barrius, de Antiquitate et Situ Calabrise, with the notes of Thomas Aceti, 1. 4. c. 2. p. 288, &c. where he refutes the Bollandists, who place his birth at Aquino in Campania, on the borders of that province.

² L, 1. Conf. c. 7.

³ Conf. 1. 5. c. 8.

any women whatever, and with any young men whose steady virtue did not render him perfectly secure as to their behaviour. Whilst others went to profane diversions, he retired into some church or into his closet, making prayer and study his only pleasure. He learned rhetoric under Peter I. Martin, and philosophy under Peter of Hibernia, one of the most learned men of his age, and with such wonderful progress, that he repeated the lessons more clearly than the master had explained them: yet his greater care was to advance daily in the science of the saints, by holy prayer, and all good works. His humility concealed them; but his charity and fervour sometimes betrayed his modesty, and discovered them, especially in his great alms, for which he deprived himself of almost all things, and in which he was careful to hide from his left-hand what his right did.

The Order of St. Dominick, who had been dead twenty-two years, then abounded with men full of the spirit of God. The frequent conversations Thomas had with one of that body, a very interior holy man, filled his heart with heavenly devotion and comfort, and inflamed him daily with a more ardent love of God which so burned in his breast that at his prayers his countenance seemed one day, as it were, to dart rays of light, and he conceived a vehement desire to consecrate himself wholly to God in that Order. His tutor perceived his inclinations and informed the count of the matter, who omitted neither threats nor promises to defeat such a design. But the saint, not listening to flesh and blood in the call of heaven, demanded with earnestness to be admitted into the Order, and accordingly received the habit in the convent of Naples, in 1243, being then seventeen years old. The Countess Theodora his mother, being informed of it, set out for Naples to disengage him, if possible, from that state of life. Her son, on the first news of her journey, begged his superiors to remove him, as they did first to the convent of St. Sabina in Rome, and soon after to Paris, out of the reach of his relations. Two of his brothers, Landulph and Reynolds, commanders in the emperor's army in Tuscany, by her directions so well guarded all the roads that he fell into their hands, near Acqua-Pendente. They endeavoured to pull off his habit, but he resisted them so violently that they conducted him in it to the seat of his parents, called Rocca-Secca. The mother overjoyed at their success, made no doubt of overcoming her son's resolution. She endeavoured to persuade him that to embrace such an Order, against his parents' advice, could not be the call of heaven; adding ail manner of reasons, fond caresses, entreaties, and tears. Nature made her eloquent and pathetic. He appeared sensible of her affliction, but his constancy was not to be shaken. His answers were modest and respectful, but firm in showing his resolution to be the call of God, and ought consequently to take place of all other views whatsoever, even of his service any other way. At last, offended at his unexpected resistance, she expressed her displeasure in very choleric words, and ordered him to be more closely confined and guarded, and that no one should see him but his two sisters. The reiterated solicitations of the young ladies were a long and violent assault. They omitted nothing that flesh and blood could inspire on such an occasion, and represented to him the danger of causing the death of his mother by grief. He on the contrary spoke to them in so moving a manner, on the contempt of the world, and the love of virtue, that they both yielded to the force of his reasons, for his quitting the world, and by his persuasion, devoted themselves to a sincere practice of piety.

This solitude furnished him with the most happy opportunity for holy contemplation and assiduous prayer. Some time after, his sisters conveyed to him some books, viz., a bible, Aristotle's Logics, and the works of the Master of the Sentences. During this interval his two brothers, Landulph and Reynold, returning home from the army, found their mother in the greatest affliction, and the young novice triumphant in his resolution. They would needs undertake to overcome him, and began their assault by shutting him up in a tower of the castle. They tore in pieces his habit on his back, and after bitter reproaches and dreadful threats they left him, hoping his confinement, and the mortifications every one

strove to give him, would shake his resolution. This not succeeding, the devil suggested to these two young officers a new artifice for diverting him from pursuing his vocation. They secretly introduced one of the most beautiful and most insinuating young strumpets of the country into his chamber, promising her a considerable reward in case she could draw him into sin. She employed all the arms of Satan to succeed in so detestable a design. The saint, alarmed and affrighted at the danger, profoundly humbled himself, and cried out to God most earnestly for his protection; then snatching up a firebrand struck her with it, and drove her out of his chamber. After this victory, not moved with pride, but blushing with confusion for having been so basely assaulted, he fell on his knees and thanked God for his merciful preservation, consecrated to him anew his chastity, and redoubled his prayers, and the earnest cry of his heart with sighs and tears, to obtain the grace of being always faithful to his promises. Then falling into a slumber, as the most ancient historians of his life relate,⁴ he was visited by two angels, who seemed to gird him round the waist with a cord so tight that it awoke him, and made him cry out. His guards ran in, but he kept his secret to himself. It was only a little before his death that he disclosed this incident to F. Reynold, his confessor, adding that he had received this favour about thirty years before, from which time he had never been annoyed with temptations of the flesh; yet he constantly used the utmost caution and watchfulness against that enemy, and he would otherwise have deserved to forfeit that grace. One heroic victory sometimes obtains of God a recompense and triumph of this kind. Our saint having suffered in silence this imprisonment and persecution upwards of a twelve month, some say two years, at length, on the remonstrances of Pope Innocent IV. and the emperor Frederick, on account of so many acts of violence in his regard, both the countess and his brothers began to relent. The Dominicans of Naples being informed of this, and that his mother was disposed to connive at measures that might be taken to procure his escape, they hastened in disguise to Rocca-Secca. where his sister, knowing that the countess no longer opposed his escape, contrived his being let down out of his tower in a basket. He was received by his brethren in their arms, and carried with joy to Naples. The year following he there made his profession, looking on that day as the happiest of his whole life in which he made a sacrifice of his liberty that he might belong to God alone. But his mother and brothers renewed their complaints to Pope Innocent IV., who sent for Thomas to Rome, and examined him on the subject of his vocation to the state of religion, in their presence; and having received entire satisfaction on this head, the pope admired his virtue, and approved of his choice of that state of life, which from that time he was suffered to pursue in peace. Albertus Magnus, teaching then at Cologne, the general, John the Teutonic, took the saint with him from Rome to Paris, and thence to Cologne. Thomas gave all his time, which was not employed in devotion and other duties, to his studies, retrenching part of that which was allowed for his meals and sleep, not out of a vain passion, or the desire of applause, but for the advancement of God's honour and the interests of religion, according to what he himself teaches.⁵

His humility made him conceal his progress and deep penetration, insomuch that his school-fellows thought he learned nothing and on account of his silence, called him The Dumb Ox, and the Great Sicilian Ox. One of them even offered to explain his lessons to him, whom he thankfully listened to without speaking, though he was then capable of teaching him. They who know how much scholars and masters usually seek to distinguish themselves, and display their science, will give to so uncommon a humility its due praise. But the brightness of his genius, his quick and deep penetration and

⁴ Gul. Tocco. Bern. Guid. Antonin. Mai vend.

⁵ 2. 2dæ. q. 188. a 6.

learning were at last discovered, in spite of all his endeavours to conceal them: for his master Albertus, having propounded to him several questions on the most knotty and obscure points, his answers, which the duty of obedience extorted, astonished the audience; and Albertus, not able to contain his joy and admiration, said: “We call him the dumb ox, but he will give such a bellow in learning as will be heard all over the world.” This applause made no impression on the humble saint. He continued the same in simplicity, modesty, silence, and recollection because his heart was the same; equally insensible to praises and humiliations, full of nothing but of God and his own insufficiency, never reflecting on his own qualifications, or on what was the opinion of others concerning him. In his first year, under Albertus Magnus, he wrote comments on Aristotle’s Ethics. The general chapter of the Dominicans, held at Cologne in 1245, deputed Albertus to teach at Paris, in their college of St. James, which the university had given them; and it is from that college they are called in France Jacobins. St. Thomas was sent with him to continue his studies there. His school exercises did not interrupt his prayer. By an habitual sense of the divine presence, and devout aspirations, he kept his heart continually raised to God; and in difficult points redoubled with more earnestness his fervour in his prayers than his application to study. This he found attended with such success, that he often said he had learned less by books than before his crucifix, or at the foot of the altar. His constant attention to God always filled his soul with joy, which appeared in his very countenance, and made his conversation “altogether heavenly.” His humility and obedience were most remarkable in all things. One day whilst he read at table, the corrector, by mistake, bid him read a word with a false quantity, and he readily obeyed, though he knew the error. When others told him he ought notwithstanding to have given it the right pronunciation, his answer was: “It matters not how a word is pronounced, but to practise on all occasions humility and obedience is of the greatest importance.” He was so perfectly mortified, and dead to his senses, that he eat without reflecting either on the kind or quality of his food, so that after meals he often knew not what he had been eating.

In the year 1248, being twenty-two years of age, he was appointed by the general chapter to teach at Cologne, together with his old master Albertus, whose high reputation he equalled in his very first lessons. He then also began to publish his first works, which consist of comments on the Ethics, and other philosophical works of Aristotle. No one was more courteous and affable, but it was his principle to shun all unnecessary visits. To prepare himself for holy orders he redoubled his watchings, prayer, and other spiritual exercises. His devotion to the blessed Sacrament was extraordinary. He spent several hours of the day and part of the night before the altar, humbling himself in acts of profound adoration, and melting with love in contemplating the immense charity of the Man-God, whom he there adored. In saying mass he seemed to be in raptures, and often quite dissolved in tears; a glowing frequently appeared in his eyes and countenance which showed the ardour with which his heart burned within him. His devotion was most fervent during the precious moments after he had received the divine mysteries; and after saying mass he usually served at another, or at least heard one. This fire and zeal appeared also in his sermons, at Cologne, Paris, Rome, and in other cities of Italy. He was every where heard as an angel; even the Jews ran of their own accord to hear him, and many of them were converted. His zeal made him solicitous, in the first place, for the salvation of his relations. His example and exhortations induced them to an heroic practice of piety. His eldest sister consecrated herself to God in St. Mary’s at Capua, and died abbess of that monastery: the younger, Theodora, married the count of Marsico, and lived and died great virtue; as did his mother. His two brothers, Landulph, and Reynold, became sincere penitents; and having some time after left the emperor’s service, he, in revenge, burnt Aquino, their seat, in 1250, and put Reynold to death; the rest were obliged to save themselves by a

voluntary banishment, but were restored in 1268. St. Thomas, after teaching four years at Cologne, was sent, in 1252, to Paris. His reputation for perspicuity and solidity drew immediately to his school a great number of auditors.⁶ St. Thomas with great reluctance, compelled by holy obedience, consented to be admitted doctor, on the 23rd of October, in 1257, being then thirty-one years old. The professors of the university of Paris being divided about the question of the accidents remaining really, or only in appearance, in the blessed Sacrament of the altar, they agreed in 1258, to consult our saint. The young doctor, not puffed up by such an honour, applied himself first to God by prayer, then he wrote upon that question the treatise still extant, and carrying it to the church, laid it on the altar. The most ancient author of his life assures us, that while the saint remained in prayer on that occasion, some of the brethren who were present, saw him raised a little above the ground.⁷

The holy king, St. Lewis, had so great an esteem for St. Thomas, that he consulted him in affairs of state, and ordinarily informed him, the evening before, of any affair of importance that was to be treated of in council, that he might be the more ready to give advice on the point. The saint avoided the honour of dining with the king as often as he could excuse himself: and when obliged to assist at court, appeared there as recollected as in his convent. One day at the king's table, the saint cried out: "The argument is conclusive against the Manichees."⁸ His prior, being with him, bade him remember where he was. The saint would have asked the king's pardon, but that good prince, fearing he should forget the argument that had occurred to his mind, caused his secretary to write it down for him. In the year 1259 St. Thomas assisted at the thirty-sixth general chapter of his order, held at Valenciennes which

⁶ The manner of teaching then was not as it is generally at present, by dictating lessons, which the scholars write; but it was according to the practice that still obtains in some public schools, as in Padua, &c. The master delivered his explanation like an harangue; the scholars retained what they could, and often privately took down short notes to help their memory. Academic degrees were then also very different from what they now are; being conferred on none but those who taught. To be Master of Arts, a man must have studied six years at least, and be twenty-one years old. And to be qualified for teaching divinity, he must have studied eight years more, and be at least thirty-five years old. Nevertheless, St. Thomas, by a dispensation of the university, on account of his distinguished merit, was allowed to teach at twenty-five. The usual way was for one named bachelor to explain the Master of the Sentences for a year in the school of some doctor, upon whose testimony, after certain rigorous public examinations, and other formalities, the bachelor was admitted to the degree of licentiate; which gave him the license of a doctor, to teach or hold a school himself. Another year, which was likewise employed in expounding the Master of the Sentences, completed the degree of doctor, which the candidate received from the chancellor of the university, and then opened a school in form, with a bachelor to teach under him. In 1253 St. Thomas began to teach as licentiate; but a stop was put to his degrees for some time, by a violent disagreement between the regulars, principally Dominicans and Franciscans, and the university which had at first knitted them into their body, and even given the Dominicans a college. In these disputes, St. Thomas was not spared, but he for a long time had recourse to no other indication of himself than that of modesty and silence. On Palm-Sunday he was preaching in the Dominican's church of St. James, when a beadle coming in commanded silence, and read a long written invective against him and his colleagues. When he had done, the saint, without speaking one word to justify himself or his Order, continued his sermon with the greatest tranquillity and unconcern of mind. William de Saint Amour, the most violent among the secular doctors, published a book, On the dangers of the latter times, a bitter invective against the mendicant Orders, which St. Lewis sent to Pope Alexander IV. SS. Thomas and Bonaventure were sent into Italy to defend their Orders. And to confute that book, Saint Thomas published his nineteenth Opusculum, with an Apology for the mendicant Orders, showing they lay under no precept that alt should apply themselves to manual labour, and that spiritual occupations were even preferable. The pope, upon this apology, condemned the book, and also another, called the Eternal Gospel, in defence of the error of the abbot Joachim, who had advanced that the church was to have an end and be succeeded by a new church which should be formed perfectly according to the Spirit: this heresy and the errors of certain other fanatics were refuted by our saint at Rome. On his return to Paris, a violent storm terrified all the mariners and passengers, only Thomas appeared without the least fear, and continued in quiet prayer till the tempest had ceased. William de Saint Amour being banished Paris, peace was restored to the university.

⁷ Gul. Tocco.

⁸ Conclousum est contra Manichseos.

deputed him in conjunction with Albertus Magnus and three others to draw up rules for studies, which are still extant in the acts of that chapter. Returning to Paris, he there continued his lectures. Nothing was more remarkable than his meekness on all occasions. His temper was never ruffled in the heat of any dispute, nor by any insult. It was owing to this sweetness, more than to his invincible force of reasoning, that he brought a young doctor to retract on the spot a dangerous opinion, which he was maintaining a second time in his thesis. In 1261, Urban IV. called St. Thomas to Rome, and, by his order, the general appointed him to teach here. His holiness pressed him with great importunity to accept of some ecclesiastical dignity, but he knew how much safer it is to refuse than to accept a bishopric. The pope, however, obliged him always to attend his person. Thus it happened that the saint taught and preached in all the towns where that pope ever resided, as in Rome, Viterbo, Orvieto, Fondi, and Perugia. He also taught at Bologna, Naples. &c.⁹

The fruits of his preaching were no less wonderful than those of his pen. Whilst he was preaching on Good Friday on the love of God for man, and our ingratitude to him, his whole auditory melted into

⁹ The works of St. Thomas are partly philosophical, partly theological; with some comments on the holy scriptures, and several treatises of piety. The elegance of Plato gave his philosophy the greater vogue among the Gentiles; and the most Teamed of the Christian fathers were educated in the maxims of his school. His noble sentiments on the attributes of the Deity, particularly his providence, and his doctrine on the rewards and punishments in a future state, seemed favourable to religion. Nor can it be doubted that he had learned, in his travels in Egypt and Phoenicia, many traditional truths delivered down from the patriarchal ages, before the corruptions of idolatry. On the other hand, the philosophy of Aristotle was much less in request among the heathens, was silent as to all traditional truths, and contained some glaring errors, which several heretics of the first ages adopted against the gospel. On which account he is called by Tertutian the patriarch of heretics, and his works were proscribed by a council of Paris, about the year 1209. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged, by all impartial judges, that Aristotle was the greatest and most comprehensive genius of antiquity, and perhaps, of any age: and he was the only one who had laid down complete rules, and explained the laws of reasoning, and had given a thorough system of philosophy. Boetius had penetrated the depth of his genius, and the usefulness of his logics; yet did not redress his mistakes. Human reasoning is too weak without the light of revelation; and Aristotle, by relying too much on it, fell into the same gross errors. Not only many ancient heretics, but also several in the twelfth and thirteenth ages, as Peter Abailard, the Albigenes, and other heretics made a bad use of his philosophy. But above all, the Saracens of Arabia and Spain wrote with incredible subtlety on his principles. St. Thomas opposed the enemies of truth with their own weapons, and employed the philosophy of Aristotle in defence of the faith, in which he succeeded to a miracle. He discerned and confuted his errors, and set in a clear and new light the great truths of reason which that philosopher had often wrapped up in obscurity. Thus Aristotle, who had been called the terror of Christians, in the hands of Thomas, became orthodox, and furnished faith with new arms against idolatry and atheism. For this admirable doctor, though he had only a bad Latin translation of the works of that philosopher, has corrected his errors, and shown that his whole subtle system of philosophy, as far as it is grounded in truth, is subservient to divine revelation: this he has executed through the nicest metaphysical speculations, in the five first volumes of his works. He every where strikes out a new tract for himself, and enters into the most secret recesses of this shadowy region; so as to appear new even on known and beaten subjects. For his writings are original efforts of genius and reflection, and every point he handles in a manner that makes it appear new. If his speculations are some times spun fine, and his divisions run to niceties, this was the fault of the age in which he lived, and of the speculative refining geniuses of the Arabians, whom he had undertaken to pursue, and confute throughout their whole system. His comments on the four books of the Master of the Sentences, contain a methodical course of theology, and make the sixth and seventh volumes of his works; the tenth, eleventh and twelfth give us his Summa, or incomparable abridged body of divinity, though this work he never lived to finish. Among the fathers, St. Austin is principally his guide; so that the learned cardinals, Norris and Aguirre, call St. Thomas his most faithful interpreter. He draws the rules of practical duties and virtues principally from the morals of Saint Gregory on Job. He composed his Summa against the Gentiles, at the request of St. Raymund of Pennafort, to serve the preachers in Spain in converting the Jews and Saracens to the faith. He wrote comments on most parts of the holy scriptures, especially on the epistles of St. Paul, in which latter he seemed to outdo himself. By the order of Pope Urban IV. he compiled the office of the blessed sacrament, which the church uses to this day, on the feast, and during the octave, of Corpus Christi. His Opuscula, or lesser treatises, have in view the Greek Schismatics and several heresies; or discuss various points of philosophy and theology; or are comments on the creed, sacraments, decalogue, Lord's prayer and Hail Mary. In his treatises of piety he reduces the rules of an interior life to these two gospel maxims: first, That we must strenuously labour, by self-denial and mortification, to extinguish in our hearts all the sparks of pride, and the inordinate love of creatures; secondly. That by assiduous prayer, meditation, and doing the will of God in all things, we must kindle his perfect love in our souls. (Opusc. 17 Sc 18.) His works are printed in nineteen volumes folio.

tears to such a degree, that he was obliged to stop several times, that they might recover themselves. His discourse on the following Sunday concerning the glory of Christ, and the happiness of those who rise with him by grace, was no less pathetic and affecting. William of Tocco adds, that as the saint was coming out of St. Peter's church the same day, a woman was cured of the bloody flux by touching the hem of his garment. The conversion of two considerable Rabbis seemed still a greater miracle. St. Thomas had held a long conference with them at a casual meeting in Cardinal Richard's villa, and they agreed to resume it the next day. The saint spent the foregoing night in prayer at the foot of the altar. The next morning these two most obstinate Jews came to him of their own accord, not to dispute, but to embrace the faith, and were followed by many others. In the year 1263 the Dominicans held their fortieth general chapter in London; St. Thomas assisted at it, and obtained soon after to be dismissed from teaching. He rejoiced to see himself reduced to the state of a private religious man. Pope Clement IV. had such a regard for him, that, in 1265, among other ecclesiastical preferments, he made him an offer of the archbishopric of Naples, but could not prevail with him to accept of that or any other. The first part of his theological Summa St. Thomas composed at Bologna: he was called thence to Naples. Here it was that, according to Tocco and others, Dominick Caserte beheld him, while in fervent prayer, raised from the ground, and heard a voice from the crucifix directed to him in these words: "Thou hast written well of me, Thomas: what recompense dost thou desire?" He answered: "No other than thyself, Lord."¹⁰

From the 6th of December, in 1273, to the 7th of March following, the day of his death, he neither dictated nor wrote anything on theological matters. He, from that time, laid aside his studies to fix his thoughts and heart entirely on eternity, and to aspire with the greatest ardour and most languishing desires to the enjoyment of God in perfect love. Pope Gregory X. had called a general council, the second of Lyons, with the view of extinguishing the Greek schism, and raising succours to defend the holy land against the Saracens. The ambassadors of the emperor Michael Palseologus, together with the Greek prelates, were to assist at it. The council was to meet on the 1st of May in 1274. His holiness, by brief directed to our saint, ordered him to repair thither, and to prepare himself to defend the Catholic cause against the Greek schismatics. Though indisposed, he set out from Naples about the end of January. His dear friend, F. Reynold of Pipemo, was appointed his companion, and ordered to take care that he did not neglect himself, which the saint was apt to do. St. Thomas on the road called at the castle of Magenza, the seat of his niece Francisca of Aquino, married to the count of Cecan. Here his distemper increased, which was attended with a loss of appetite. One day he said, to be rid of their importunities, that he thought he could eat a little of a certain fish which he had formerly eaten in France, but which was not easily to be found in Italy. Search however was made, and the fish procured; but the saint refused to touch It, in imitation of David on the like occasion. Soon after his appetite returned a little, and his strength with it; yet he was assured that his last hour was at hand. This however did not hinder him from proceeding on his journey, till his fever increasing, he was forced to stop at Fossa-Nuova, a famous abbey of the Cistercians, in the diocese of Terracina, where formerly stood the city called Forum Appii. Entering the monastery, he went first to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, according to his custom. He poured forth his soul with extraordinary fervour, in the presence of Him who now called him to his kingdom. Passing thence into the cloister, which he never lived to go out of, he repeated these words:¹¹ *This is my rest for ages without end.* He was lodged in the abbot's apartment, where he lay ill

¹⁰ Bene scripsisti de me, Thoma: quam mercedem accipies? Non aliam, nisi te, Domine.

¹¹ Psalm cxxxi. 14.

for near a month. The good monks treated him with uncommon veneration and esteem, and as if he had been an angel from heaven. They would not employ any of their servants about him, but chose to serve him themselves in the meanest offices, as in cutting or carrying wood for him to burn, &c. His patience, humility, constant recollection, and prayer were equally their astonishment and edification.

The nearer he saw himself to the term of all his desires, the entering into the joy of his Lord, the more tender and inflamed are his longings after death. He had continually in his mouth these words of St. Austin.¹² “Then shall I truly live, when I shall be quite filled with you alone, and your love; now I am a burden to myself, because I am not entirely full of you.” In such pious transports of heavenly love he never ceased sighing after the glorious day of eternity. The monks begged he would dictate an exposition of the book of Canticles, in imitation of St. Bernard. He answered: “Give me St. Bernard’s spirit, and I will obey.” But at last, to renounce perfectly his own will he dictated the exposition of that most mysterious of all the divine books. It begins: *Solomon inspiratus*. It is not what his erudition might have suggested, but what love inspired him with in his last moments, when his pure soul was hastening to break the chains of mortality, and drown itself in the ocean of God’s immensity, and in the delights of eternity.¹³ The holy doctor at last finding himself too weak to dictate any more begged the religious to withdraw, recommended himself to their prayers, and desiring their leave to employ the few precious moments he had to live with God alone. He accordingly spent them in fervent acts of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, humility and repentance. He made a general confession of his whole life to F. Reynold, with abundance of tears for his imperfections and sins of frailty; for in the judgement of those to whom he had manifested his interior, he had never offended God by any mortal sin. And he said to F. Reynold, before his death, that he thanked God with his whole heart for having prevented him with his grace, and always conducted him as it were by the hand, and preserved him from any known sin that destroys charity in the soul; adding, that this was purely God’s mercy to which he was indebted for his preservation from every sin which he had not committed.¹⁴ Having received absolution with the sentiments of the most perfect penitent, he desired the Viaticum. Whilst the abbot and community were preparing to bring it, he begged to be taken off his bed, and laid upon ashes spread upon the floor. Thus lying on the ground, weak in body but vigorous in mind, he waited for the priest with tears of the most tender devotion. When he saw the host in the priest’s hand, he said: “I firmly believe, that Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is present in this august sacrament. I adore you my God, and my Redeemer: I receive You, the price of my redemption, the Viaticum of my pilgrimage; for whose honour I have studied, laboured, preached, and taught. I hope I never advanced any tenet as your word, which I had not learned from you. If through ignorance I have done otherwise, I revoke everything of that kind, and submit all my writings to the judgement of the holy Roman church.” Then recollecting himself, after other acts of faith, adoration, and love, he received the holy Viaticum; but remained on the ashes till he had finished his thanksgiving. Growing still weaker, amidst his transports of love, he desired extreme unction, which he received, answering himself to all the prayers. After this, he lay in peace and joy as appeared by the serenity of his countenance; and he was heard to pronounce these aspirations: “Soon, soon will the God of all comfort complete his mercies on me, and fill all my desires. I shall shortly be satiated in

¹² Conf I. 10. c. 28.

¹³ There is another commentary on the same book which sometimes bears his name, and begins: *Sonet vox tua in auribus meis*; which was not the work of this saint, but of Haymo, bishop of Halberstadt. See Echard, t. 1. p. 323. Touron, p. 714. Le Long, *Bibl. Sacra*, p. 766.

¹⁴ *I tibi debeo et quod non feci*. Saint Aug.

him, and drink of the torrent of his delights: be inebriated from the abundance of his house, and in him who is the source of life, I shall behold the true light.” Seeing all in tears about him he comforted them, saying: Death was his gain and his joy. F. Reynold said, he had hoped to see him triumph over the adversaries of the church in the council of Lyons, and placed in a rank in which he might do it some signal service. The saint answered: “I have begged of God, as the greatest favour, to die a simple religious man, and I now thank him for it. It is a greater benefit than he has granted to many of his holy servants, that he is pleased to call me out of this world so early to enter into his joy; wherefore grieve not for me who am overwhelmed with joy.” He returned thanks to the abbot and monks of Fossa-Nuova for their charity to him. One of the community asked him by what means we might live always faithful to God’s grace. He answered: “Be assured that he who shall always walk faithfully in his presence, always ready to give him an account of all his actions, shall never be separated from him by consenting to sin.” These were his last words to men, after which he only spoke to God in prayer, and gave up the ghost, on the 7th of March, in 1274, a little after midnight; some say in the fiftieth year of his age. But Ptolemy of Lucca, and other contemporary authors say expressly in his forty-eight, which also agrees with his whole history. He was very tall, and every way proportioned.

The concourse of people at the saint’s funeral was extraordinary: several monks of that house, and many other persons, were cured by his relics and intercession, of which many instances, juridically proved, are mentioned by William of Tocco, in the bull of his canonisation, and other authors. The Bollandists give us other long authentic relations of the like miracles continued afterwards, especially in the translations of those holy relics. The university of Paris sent to the general and provincial of the Dominicans a letter of condolence upon his death, giving the highest commendations to the saint’s learning and sanctity and hedging the treasure of his holy body. Naples, Rome, and many other universities, princes, and Orders, contended no less for it. One of his hands, uncorrupted, was cut off in 1288, and given to his sister, the countess Theodora, who kept it in her domestic chapel of San Severino. After her death it was given to the Dominicans’ convent of Salerno. After several contestations, Pope Urban V. many years after his death, granted his body to the Dominicans to carry to Paris or Toulouse, as Italy already possessed the body of St. Dominick at Bologna. The sacred treasure was carried privately into France, and received at Toulouse in the most honourable manner: one hundred and fifty thousand people came to meet and conduct it into the city, having at their head, Lewis, duke of Anjou, brother to king Charles V. the archbishop of Toulouse and Narbonne, and many bishops, abbots, and noblemen. It rests now in the Dominicans’ church at Toulouse, in a rich shrine, with a stately mausoleum over it, which reaches almost up to the roof of the church, and hath four faces. An arm of the saint was, at the same time, sent to the great convent of the Dominicans at Paris, and placed in St Thomas’s chapel in their church, which the king declared a royal chapel. The faculty of theology meet to assist at a high mass there on the anniversary festival of the saint.

The kingdom of Naples, after many pressing solicitations, obtained in 1372, from the general chapter held at Toulouse, a bone of the other arm of St. Thomas. It was kept in the church of the Dominicans at Naples till 1603, when the city being delivered from a public calamity by his intercession, it was placed in the metropolitan church among the relics of the other patrons of the country. That kingdom by the briefs of Pius V. in 1567, and of Clement VIII. in 1603, confirmed by Paul v. honours him as a principal patron. He was solemnly canonised by Pope John XXII. in 1323. Pope Pius V., in 1667, commanded his festival and office to be kept equal with those of the four doctors of the western church.

Many in their studies, as in other occupations, take great pains to little purpose, often to draw from them the poison of vanity or error; or at least to drain their affections, and rather to nourish pride and other vices in the heart than to promote true virtue. Sincere humility and simplicity of heart are essential conditions for the sanctification of studies and for the improvement of virtue by them. Prayer must also both go before and accompany them. St. Thomas spoke much to God by prayer, that God might speak to him by enlightening his understanding in his reading and studies; and he received in this what he asked in the other exercise. This prodigy of human wit, this unparalleled genius, which penetrated the most knotty difficulties in all the sciences, whether sacred or profane, to which he applied himself, was accustomed to say, that he learned more at the foot of the crucifix than in books. We ought never to set ourselves to read or study anything without having first made our morning meditation, and without imploring in particular the divine light in everything we read; and seasoning our studies by frequent aspirations to God in them, and by keeping our souls in an humble attention to his presence. In intricate difficulties we ought more earnestly, prostrate at the foot of a crucifix, to ask of Christ the resolution of our doubts. We should thus receive, in the school of so good a master, that science which makes saints, by giving, with other sciences, the true knowledge of God and ourselves, and purifying and kindling in the will the fire of divine love with the sentiments of humility and other virtues. By a little use, fervent aspirations to God will arise from all subjects in the driest studies, and it will become easy, and as it were natural in them, to raise our heart earnestly to God, either despising the vain pursuits, or detesting the vanity, and deploring the blindness of the world, or aspiring after heavenly gifts, or begging light, grace, or the divine love. This is a maxim of the utmost importance in an interior or spiritual life, which otherwise, instead of being assisted, is entirely overwhelmed and extinguished by studies, whether profane or sacred, and in its place a spirit of self-sufficiency, vanity, and jealousy is contracted, and the seeds of all other spiritual vices secretly sown. Against this danger, St. Bonaventure warns all students strongly to be upon their guard, saying, “If a person repeats often in his heart, *Lord when shall I have thee?* he will feel an heavenly fire kindled in his soul much more than by a thousand bright thoughts or fine speculations on divine secrets, on the eternal generation of the Word, or the procession of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁵ Prayer and true virtue even naturally conduce to the perfection of learning in every branch for parity of the heart, and the disengagement of the affections from all irregular passions, render the misunderstanding clear, qualify the mind to judge impartially of truth in its researches, divest it of many prejudices, the fatal sources of errors, and inspire a modest distrust in a person’s own abilities and lights. Thus virtue and learning mutually assist and improve each other.

Source

<http://www.archive.org/details/livesfathersmar08butlgoog>

¹⁵ St. Bonav. 1. de Mystic Theol. a ult