

Readings: *Wisdom 7: 7– 10, 15– 16; Psalm 118 (119)9– 14; Matthew 23: 8– 12.*

Thomas Aquinas takes his name from his birthplace, Aquino in southern Italy. He was born about 1225. Between the ages of five and thirteen he was an oblate in the Abbey of Monte Cassino, and from fourteen to nineteen he studied at the University of Naples. In 1244 he joined the Order of Preachers, founded in 1216 by S. Dominic, and known, then as now, for its concern for study and teaching. His family were opposed to this decision, so they kidnapped and imprisoned him. When he regained his freedom he studied in Paris and Cologne under a fellow Dominican, Saint Albert. During this time, the writings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle had become known in the West: Albert and Thomas were leaders among those who sought to reconcile the teachings of the Church with philosophy and the new scientific knowledge it included.

From 1252 to 1272 Thomas taught in Paris, Rome, and other Italian centres, during which time he began his two major works, each known as a *Summa* (that is a summary of all knowledge). His exposition of Christian doctrine was to become influential in the official teaching of the Church. In 1272 Thomas was recalled to Italy to reorganize the Dominican house of studies in Naples. There in December of the following year he had an experience while celebrating mass, which led him to stop work on the *Summa*. He said that he was giving up writing because “*All I have written seems to me like straw compared with what I have seen, and what has been revealed to me*”.

Whatever this experience was, it reminds us that, despite his massive intellectual ability and the effort he put into study and writing, Thomas was at heart a devout Dominican friar.

One of the achievements by which he remains known today is the composition of the liturgical texts for the feast of *Corpus Christi*, which in 1264 Pope Urban IV had ordered to be observed throughout the Church. These texts continue in use today and include the hymns *Pange lingua gloriosi* (Of the glorious Body telling), and *Verbum supernum prodiens* (The heavenly Word proceeding forth), from which verses traditionally sung at Benediction are taken.

It is said that, when our Lord asked him what reward he wished for having written so well about the Sacred Body, Thomas replied *Nihil nisi te, Domine*, (Nothing but yourself, Lord).

He died on 7th March 1274, was canonised in 1323, and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1567.