

**17 Ordinary A 2008**  
**St. Mary, Siloam Springs, AR**

St. Thomas Aquinas is arguably one of the wisest saints the church – or the world for that matter – has ever known. Even though he lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, we still read with great profit his writings on theology and philosophy. But while he was in the monastery studying to become a Dominican priest, he was very quiet, and so many concluded that he was a little slow mentally. His taciturn personality even earned him the nickname, “The Dumb Ox.” Well, one day his brothers in the monastery decided to play a joke on Brother Thomas. As he was walking down the hallway with his head buried in a book, 3 brothers stood staring out the monastery window. As he came near, one yelled, “Thomas, Thomas, come look: there are cows flying!” Thomas came running to look out the window, but of course, there were no cows flying. The brothers laughed and joked about how gullible Thomas was. Thomas turned from the window and quietly replied, “I would rather believe that cows could fly than that brothers would lie.” Ouch! I suppose that later that afternoon, there was a longer line for confession than usual. But you see, even though Thomas didn’t *talk much*, he did *think much*; he tried to understand things deeply, not merely on the surface. He left the Church a rich legacy of profound theology.

In the first reading today we hear the story of one of the wisest men in the Bible, King Solomon. You will remember that Solomon was the son of King David. Well, it’s

Solomon's coronation day, and God wants to give Solomon a gift, and says: "Ask for anything that you wish." And what does Solomon ask for? Does he ask for a new car? No. Does he ask to be as good looking as Brad Pitt? No. Does he at least ask for life-time of free gas? No. He asks for wisdom. But notice how God *describes* wisdom. He says: "You have asked for understanding so that you may know what is right." In other words, wisdom is not about being clever, it's not about having lots of facts you can quote, it's not about having a memory like a steal-trap. Rather, it's about grasping things in their depth, or, to put it another way, we should rather believe that cows can fly than that brothers would lie. Wisdom, you see, is about understanding things deeply, and then living according to that understanding.

One of the things it's taken me a long time to understand and appreciate is the wisdom that my parents have. I'm ashamed to admit this, but when I was a teenager, I was often embarrassed by my parents. Since I grew up in the US, I could speak English without an accent. But since my parents spent most of their life in India, they have a pretty heavy Indian accent, and sometimes they say the wrong word, or they use idioms incorrectly. And I used to think that my parents weren't very smart. But then I had to learn Spanish, and guess what happened? I have a horrible gringo accent! I often don't know what words to use. And I don't even know any Spanish idioms, let alone use them correctly! But I also realized something else: my

parents actually speak 4 Indian languages, as well as English. And here I am struggling to learn just one more language than English. And here's what I've finally come to understand: you can make a mistake because you know too little (like when you don't know how to speak another language), and you can also make a mistake because you know too much (like when you can speak 4 other languages). I make the first kind of mistake, and my parents make the second kind. You see, I'm beginning to see things more deeply – I'm beginning to understand. Maybe this is what they call wisdom.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen tells the story of how he felt when he was 17 years old. He felt that he knew everything; there was nothing else that anyone could teach him. And he also thought that his father knew nothing. Then when he turned 21, he began to see things differently, and he was amazed at how much his father had learned in just 4 years! Of course, it was Fulton Sheen who was beginning to learn and understand.

Folks, we live in the "Information Age," where knowledge about anything and everything is available at the touch of a button. You can go to "google" and learn about any subject imaginable. But sadly, while we have lots of *knowledge*, we have very little *understanding*. You see, information can be like junk food: we stuff our minds full of it, but there's little there of any real value. We also live in the world of the "sound byte." Whoever has the catchiest

campaign slogan grabs our attention, and usually grabs our vote. Have you ever noticed that whatever commercial is funniest or most clever will sell the most products? We glance at the headlines in the newspaper and suddenly we feel we have a grasp of what's going on in the world. But when was the last time you read a book of classical literature, like *Crime and Punishment*, or listened to a Shakespearean play, or attended an opera or a symphony? The Bible says that "wisdom is crying out in the streets," but too often we're too engrossed in our i-pods and our blackberries and our facebook's to take the time to think and understand. Now, these things are not bad in themselves, but they **can be** if they cause us to live only on the surface of life, and we never dive down into the depths of things.

Folks, if God were to appear to you today and tell you He'll give you anything you ask for, do you think you would ask for wisdom?

Praised be Jesus Christ!