# Thomas Aquinas: Master of Preaching

Randall B. Smith
*University of St. Thomas*
*Houston, TX*

It is odd that Thomas Aquinas's sermons have garnered so little attention over the years, given that he was a prominent member of the Order of Preachers, a group that identified itself precisely by its members' aptitude for *preaching*. As a Master of the Sacred Page at Paris, one of Thomas's official duties, along with lecturing on the Bible and engaging in disputation, was preaching. All his extraordinarily valuable commentaries on the texts of Aristotle were, by contrast, largely products of his spare time.

According to his earliest biographers, Thomas was renowned as an excellent preacher, not only to the educated but also to simple uneducated laymen. Bernardo Gui reports that the common people "heard him with great respect as a real man of God," whose words "had a warmth in them that kindled the love of God and sorrow for sin in men's hearts."[1]

And yet, although Thomas was known as an excellent preacher, and although it was his constant practice to preach, it is only recently (2014), some 133 years since the creation of the Leonine Commission, that a modern critical edition of all of Thomas's extant sermons by the late Louis

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[1] Bernardo Gui, *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, chap. 29, quoted from *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, trans. and ed. Kenelm Foster, O.P. (London: Longmans and Green, 1959), 47–48. Both William of Tocco and Gui suggest that Thomas preached to the faithful in his native Italian, and when in Naples, in South Italian (74n68). Sadly, none of these sermons have survived, and we have only a precious few of the sermons that Thomas preached in Latin. What we have are Thomas's "sermon-conferences" (*collationes*). For the difference between a "sermon-conference" and a liturgical sermon, see Randall Smith, *Reading the Sermons of Thomas Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2016), 7–9.

Bataillon, O.P., has finally appeared.[2] We also now (as of 2010) thankfully have in print an English translation of the extant sermons done by Mark-Robin Hoogland, C.P.[3]

## Take Note: The Opening Biblical Verse in a Sermon Serves as a Mnemonic Device

But readers should be forewarned: Even the devoted fan of Aquinas may find the sermons something of an odd read. Although in his biblical commentaries Thomas is noteworthy for his devotion to the literal sense of the text, he seems in his sermons to garner all sorts of odd interpretations from just one or two words in the biblical text.

Consider, for example, Sermon 16 (*Inveni David*), which is based on the passage from Ps 88:21 that reads: "I have found David my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him; my hand will assist him and my arm will make him firm." In the body of the sermon, we find Thomas claiming: "From these words we can learn four praiseworthy things of this holy bishop St. Nicholas [on whose feast day this sermon was preached]: (1) first, his wondrous election; (2) second, his unique consecration; (3) third, the effective execution of his task; and (4) fourth, his immovable and firm stability. His wondrous election is shown in the words: 'I have found David, my servant.' His special consecration is shown where it says: 'I have anointed him with my sacred oil.' The effective execution of his task is shown in the words: 'My hand will help him.' His stable firmness is shown where it says: 'And my arm will make him firm.'"

What Thomas's "exegesis" of the text seems to suggest is that the Psalmist, who lives roughly around the year 1000 BC, is referring neither to David in this psalm (even though it *says* literally "I have found David, my servant"), nor even to Christ (by means of an allegorical understanding of "David"). No, Thomas seems to be saying, the Psalmist is actually referring to the fourth-century (AD) saint Nicholas of Myra. At this point, even devoted fans of Aquinas may feel that Thomas is guilty of *eis*egesis rather than *ex*egesis—transporting meanings *into* the text rather digging meaning *out of* the text. Modern biblical exegetes, one hardly need add, would *certainly* draw that conclusion.

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2 This is Leonine ed. volume 44.1 (ed. L. J. Bataillon).

3 *Thomas Aquinas: The Academic Sermons*, trans. Mark-Robin Hoogland, C.P., The Fathers of the Church: Mediaeval Continuation 11 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010). I have quoted from Hoogland's translation throughout this article. Quotes of the Latin are from Leonine ed. 44.1.

But that judgment, I suggest, is the result of "a category mistake" based on a misunderstanding of the purpose served by the opening biblical epigraph in thirteenth-century sermons. A careful reading of Thomas's sermons will show that the biblical verse that stands at the beginning of the text served as a unique mnemonic device—a memory aid—which helped the listeners remember more easily the material covered in the sermon.

As Mary Carruthers has noted in her fine study, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*: "Medieval culture was fundamentally memorial, to the same profound degree that modern culture in the West is documentary."[4] Thus, medieval scholars prized mnemonic devices to the same degree that modern scholars prize a thorough index, a good annotated bibliography, or a complete analytical concordance. (Thomists, of course, have the invaluable *Index Thomisticus*.) "Ancient and medieval people reserved their awe for memory," says Carruthers, and "their greatest geniuses they describe as people of superior memories"; indeed, "they regard[ed] it as a mark of superior *moral* character as well as intellect." "They would not," she insists, "have understood our separation of 'memory' from 'learning.' In their understanding of the matter, it was memory that made knowledge into useful experience, and memory that combined these disparate bits of information-become-experience into concrete moral 'judgments.'"[5]

Indeed, one of the great paradigmatic figures of this memory culture in the Middle Ages was Thomas Aquinas, of whom it was reported that he was able to dictate to three secretaries, and even occasionally to four, on different subjects at the same time. In her wonderful book, Carruthers compares this ability to dictate to several scribes at once with a memory device developed decades earlier by Hugh of St. Victor whereby the novice could learn several psalms at once in such a way as to be able to move back and forth easily from any one place in one to any place in the others. "The fundamental principle," she says, "is to 'divide' the material to be remembered into pieces short enough to be recalled in single units and to key these into an easily reconstructable order."[6] We will see a similar practice when we come to Thomas's use of the opening biblical epigraph. The use

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4 Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1. For good descriptions of the various approaches to memory devices, see particularly chaps. 3 ("Elementary Memory Design") and 4 ("The Arts of Memory") in Carruthers.

5 Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 1.

6 Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 11.

of such memory devices, as Carruthers documents, was a standard part of the basic medieval pedagogy in the language arts.

Thus, the opening biblical verse that prefaces Thomas's sermons is not the text to be *preached on* (in the sense of doing an exegesis of the text); it is, rather, a verbal mnemonic device systematically keyed to the material in the sermon. Allow me to illustrate with an example.

## Sermon 5: Behold Your King

If you find the sermon *Ecce rex tuus*, listed in Hoogland's translation as Sermon 5, you will find that the sermon is prefaced with the Latin verse "Ecce rex tuus venit tibi mansuetus" ("Behold, your king comes to you, meek [and riding on a donkey]"). This is a passage from the prophet Zechariah quoted in Matthew's Gospel during Jesus's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matt 21:6, quoting Zech 9:9). The casual reader might be tempted to think (with some justification): here is a verse that deals with Jesus's coming into Jerusalem; the sermon is supposed to deal with Jesus's coming at advent; so clearly (we assume), the sermon will take its theme from, and perhaps be a commentary on, this biblical verse. As Jesus came triumphantly into Jerusalem (we expect Thomas to say), so too he will come triumphantly at the end of time. And if we had some experience with patristic or early medieval biblical commentaries, we might even expect allegories on, for example, the palm branches, the donkey, the city of Jerusalem, and perhaps various other elements of the story. But that is not what happens. So let us focus instead on the passage as a mnemonic device and see what we discover.

After a brief introduction and prayer, Thomas repeats the opening epigraph—"Behold your king comes to you, meek"—and tells his listeners: "In these words, the coming of Christ is clearly foretold to us." Then, after a brief discussion of the four "advents" of Christ—the one in which he came in the flesh, the one by which he comes into our minds, the one in which he comes at death of the just, and the one in which he will come at the end of time in judgment (the importance of distinguishing these four will become clear in a moment)—Thomas continues: "And the first advent of Christ is touched upon in the aforementioned words; in which we can see four things: first, a demonstration of the coming of Christ, where it says 'Behold'; second, the condition of His coming, where it says 'your king'; third the humility of His coming, where it says 'meek'; and fourth, the utility of His coming: 'for you.'"

In what follows, Thomas begins first, naturally enough, with unfolding

the points he wishes to associate with the word "behold." There are four things we can understand when we use the word "behold," he says. First, when we use the word "behold," we can be asserting something of which we are certain, as in: "Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10–11). Now, "just as some people doubted concerning the first coming of the Lord, so also some doubt concerning His second coming" at the end of time. And yet, in the Psalms, it assures us: "Surely the Lord will come" (96:13). So to reassure those who fear that the soul will not survive death, the opening biblical verse from Zechariah announces: "Behold, . . . your king comes to you."

Next, when we say "behold," we might be indicating a determination of time, as in: "Behold, my hour is come." So, "although the time of Christ's coming at the final judgment is not at a time determined for us, because God wished us to always be vigilant in good works, yet His coming in the flesh was at a determined time, and so the text says: 'behold.'"

Third, when we say "behold," we can be indicating the manifestation of a thing, as when John the Baptist points at Jesus and says: "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1.29). So then, although the coming of Christ into the mind is hidden, yet Christ's coming in the flesh was manifest and visible. So the verse says: "Behold, your king comes to you."

And fourthly, when we use the world "behold," we can use it for the strengthening of men, and this in two circumstances: first, when they have won victory over their enemies, as in "Behold, the day has come which I desire; . . . my enemies appear before me"; and second, when they have attained the good, as in "Behold, how good the Lord is." And since we have obtained both things in the coming of Christ—namely, we have peace and victory over the enemy, and we have joy from the hope obtained of future goods—so the prophet says "Behold."

Having finished with "behold," Thomas turns next to the words "your king," which, he says, "show the condition of Christ's coming." Now a person's coming is awaited with solemnity for two reasons, says Thomas: either because of his greatness, if he is, for example, a *king*; or because of a special love, if he is, for example, an intimate friend—thus the word "your." But Christ was coming as both king *and* friend, thus the combination "your king."

Since the Latin is *Rex tuus* (whereas in English we say, "your king"), Thomas focuses first on the things that follow from Christ being a "king" (*rex*) and then later takes up the things that follow from Christ being our "friend" (which follows from the word *tuus*, "your"). First, then, a "king"

suggests unity; second, he has fullness of power; third, he has an abundant jurisdiction; and fourth, a king brings equity of justice.

Regarding the first, there must be unity for there to be kingship, otherwise, if there were many, dominion would not pertain to any one of them. Thus, we must reject Arius, says Thomas, "who was positing many gods, saying that the Son was other than the Father." Second, Christ is king in that he has fullness of power. Thus, laws are not imposed *on* him, but rather he has authority *over* the law; which is why he can say in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 6, "You have heard it said of old; . . . but I say to you," as if to say, "I am the true king who can establish the law for you." Third, Christ has an abundance to his jurisdiction. Whereas other kings have dominion over this town or those cities, all creatures have been made subject to Christ. Fourth, Christ brings equity of justice. Whereas tyrants submit all things to their own utility, Christ orders all things to the common good. It is in all these ways, concludes Thomas, that Christ comes "for you" (*venit tibi*).

And with this, the sermon ends, or at least seems to. But if we have been paying attention, we know that Thomas has not yet finished "unpacking" his opening verse from the Gospel of Matthew: "Ecce, Rex tuus venit tibi mansuetus" (the technical Latin term for this unpacking is *dilatatio*, root of our word "dilation," so let us say Thomas has not yet finished "dilating"). He has completely dilated only the words *Ecce* and *rex*—he still needs to dilate the words *tuus*, *venit tibi*, and *mansuetus*.

## Continuing Later with the *Collatio*

Since this was a university sermon, and preachers giving university sermons at the University of Paris were required by statute to give a *collatio* at vespers later that same night, if we look at the *collatio* that comes after this sermon, we will find the same epigraph, after which Thomas briefly summarizes his earlier sermon and, without losing a beat, picks up right where he left off, with *tuus*: "your king." Note that Thomas can pick up "right where he left off without missing a beat" precisely because his mnemonic device allows him to locate his exact position in the sentence, review quickly the material already covered by correlating it to the key words *Ecce* and *rex*, and then proceed with his *collatio* according to his original plan.

There is no need to recount in detail the rest of Thomas's parsing of the verse. Those who are interested can consult the full outline of Sermon 5 in the appendix of this article. in the appendices of my *Reading the Sermons of Thomas Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide*. To summarize briefly, Christ is "our"

king because of the similitude of image between him and man; because of his special love for man; because of his solicitude and singular care for man; and because of his conformity or society with our human nature. He comes "for us" to manifest to us his divine majesty; to reconcile us to God from whom through sin we were estranged as enemies; to liberate us from servitude to sin; and to give us grace in the present and glory in the future. Finally, his "meekness" is shown in the meekness of his conversation; in his gentle correction of others; in his gracious acceptance of men (not only the just, but also sinners); and in his Passion, to which he was led as a lamb. And all of that, in just a few words.

*If* we mistakenly thought Thomas were attempting an exegesis of the biblical verse "Behold, your king comes for you, meek and riding on a donkey," we might be skeptical that he could have really found all this theology in this one sentence. Rather, we would likely be tempted to say that Thomas is simply reading meanings *into* the text that he wants to find there, not deriving literal meaning *from* the text. But if we realize that the opening biblical verse is really an ingenious verbal mnemonic, everything changes.

Consider how much the listener can recollect just by remembering one sentence. "Behold" reminds us of the four manifestations of Christ's coming: in the flesh; into the mind of each person; to the just at the time of their death; and as judge at the end of time. "Your king" reminds us of the condition of his coming: his unity with God the Father; he has fullness of power; he has dominion over all; and he brings equity of justice. The word "your" additionally reminds us of the similitude of image between him and man, his special love for man, his solicitude and singular care for man, and his conformity with our human nature. The words "for you" remind us of the utility of his coming: to manifest to us his divine majesty; to reconcile us to God, from whom through sin we were estranged as enemies; to liberate us from servitude to sin; and to give us grace in the present and glory in the future. And the word "meek" reminds us of the manner of his coming: he showed "meekness" in his conversation, in his gentle correction of others, in his gracious acceptance of men (not only the just, but also sinners), and in his passion, to which he was led meekly as a lamb. Each word in the sentence is a verbal cue meant to help bring to mind the content Thomas wishes to teach. To recollect the content, one need only begin by remembering the words of the opening biblical verse, and the rest will spill out naturally.

### Sermon 18: The Green Plant and the Fruit-Bearing Tree

The ability to divide the sermon "in half," so to speak, and pick up again later at the evening's vesper's service also allowed an admirable flexibility. So, for example, Thomas's sermon *Germinet terra* (Sermon 18 in the Leonine edition) begins with a *thema* verse taken from Genesis 1:11: "Let the earth sprout forth the green plant that brings forth seed, and the fruit tree that bears fruit" ("Germinet terra herbam virentem et proferentem semen, lignumque pomiferum faciens fructum"). On this occasion, the sermon at Mass was delivered on the first Sunday following the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, so it was necessary to celebrate her, but the *collatio* delivered later that evening at vespers was part of an anticipatory vespers service preparing for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross the next day. There were two major feasts, but Thomas was supposed to use the same *thema* verse for both.

By making a creative use of his opening *thema* verse, Thomas was able to use this single verse to transition seamlessly from his meditations on the Nativity of Mary in the morning's sermon into his reflections on the Exaltation of the Cross later that same day at vespers. He accomplishes this transition by "dividing" the opening *thema* verse into the two objects that the earth is said to "sprout forth": "the green plant that brings forth seed," which he associates with the Virgin Mary, and "the fruit tree that bears fruit," which he associates with the Cross of Christ. (The details can be found in the appendix.)

Mary is called a "plant," says Thomas, because of her *humility*, "green" because of her *virginity*, and "bringing forth seed" because of her *fruitfulness*. We begin with Mary as a plant. We should note three things about plants, says Thomas: first, that a plant is short in height compared to bushes and trees; second, that a plant is slender and pliant; and third, that plants bring health. "In the littleness of a humble plant," says Thomas, "the humility of Mary is commended." And if we presume (as ancient doctors did) that "opposites are cured by opposites," since man was condemned by pride, so too it was necessary that the human race should be shown humility—in this instance, by Mary—as part of its cure. Second a plant is not hard, but pliant. So too a heart is called "pliant" when it easily gives in. But there are two circumstances in which the heart can "give in": one is when the heart gives in to unnatural vices; the other is when it submits itself naturally to virtue. Mary is pliant in the second way. Indeed, says Thomas, "the natural order requires that a lower thing give in to an action of a higher thing." And since Mary was obedient to God, she is a model of

obedience, and thus also of humility. The third property of plants is that they "bring health." So too, Mary "brings health" to a world of sinners.

The next word in the *thema* verse is "green" (*virentem*)—which in the original Latin comes right *after* the word "plant" (*herbam virentem*). Just as Mary was said to be a "plant" because of her *humility*, she is called "green" because of her *virginity*. As Thomas listed three properties of a "plant" that he then associated with Mary's *humility*, so too he offers now three properties of a *green* plant that suggest Mary's *virginity*. First, plants are green because they have received plenty of moisture (*humidum*). By what is the greenness of Mary's virginity nurtured? "By heavenly love," answers Thomas. Secondly, in the greenness of green plants, we see a "beauty that delights." And what makes "a beauty that delights"? A proper order and harmony. The proper order of humankind, according to Thomas, is that the flesh should be subject to the spirit. And since, "in the Blessed Virgin nothing was disordered, neither in action nor in affection, nor did she have the first movement leading to sin," in this way Mary had in her "greenness" *a beauty that delights*. And finally, in greenness, there is *utility*. As long as a plant is green, there is hope that it will produce fruit. Indeed because Mary had the "greenness of virginity" in a most excellent way, "she produced amazing "fruit"—not only spiritual fruits, such as love, joy, and peace, but also indeed *physical* fruit: the fruit of her womb, Jesus.

Mentioning the "fruit" that Mary's greenness (her virginity) produced allows Thomas to transition smoothly into the last element of his threefold *divisio*: Mary is not merely a "green plant," but a green plant that "brings forth seed." This image from the opening *thema* affords Thomas the occasion to ask: What kind of seed is this? It is threefold: (1) holy seed, (2) virtuous seed, and (3) necessary seed. Something is "holy" because it is from God, and since Christ is from God, and indeed *is* God, the seed Mary brings forth is most holy. It is a "virtuous seed" (*semen virtuosum*) because it is compared with the mustard seed which, although it is the tiniest seed, produces a great tree. So also, says Thomas, "the little seed" is Christ who, although he was "little" on the Cross, grew so big that he filled heaven and earth. And finally, Christ is a "necessary seed," for as St. Peter says: "There is no salvation in anything else, and no other name is given to the people in which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Thus has Thomas moved deftly from praise of Mary to praise of the fruit of her womb Jesus, a rhetorical strategy that is not only theologically appropriate, but also very useful as he makes the transition in his *collatio* address later that evening into a discussion of Christ's Cross in conjunction with the phrase "the fruit-bearing tree" from the opening

*thema* verse. Three things distinguish this tree, says Thomas. First, it is wood (*lignum*). Second, it is "fruit-bearing" (*pomiferam*). And third, it produces good fruit (*faciens fructum*). From the word "wood" or "tree" (*lignum* can suggest either), we understand the three ways the Cross of Christ "befits our remedy." First, it befits the wound: just as the human race was wounded because the first man stole a fruit from the forbidden tree, so our redemption comes when Christ is sacrificed on the wood of the Cross. Second, wood befits the healing of the wound: when Adam was exiled from the garden, he was not permitted to approach the Tree of Life, so Christ is for us the Tree of Life; when the flood came, Noah was saved by the wood of the Ark; the Jewish people were saved in their battle against the Philistines when the wooden Ark of the Covenant was brought into the camp. And third, wood befits the healer. Christ is like a warrior, and the Cross is his triumphant chariot because is the thing that elevates him. It is like the wooden sedan chair of Solomon, like the rod that guides the people, and like the wooden seat of the *magister*.

Next, Thomas turns to the word "fruit-bearing" (*pomiferum*). This tree is loaded with fruit, says Thomas, but he mentions three in particular: first, the fruit of heaven; second, the fruits of the virtues that Christ exhibited on the Cross, such as love, humility, and patience; third, the writings of the teachers imbued with the wisdom that Christ taught from the Cross.

And finally, Thomas turns to the last words in his *thema* verse, "making fruit" (*fructum faciens*). It might seem redundant to say that a fruit-bearing tree *makes fruit*. But, says Thomas, while some trees bear fruit only some of the time, the tree of the Cross bears fruit all the time. And once again, we have three fruits that the wood of the Cross has produced. The first is the fruit of cleansing, for through the Cross, we are liberated from our sins. The second is the fruit of sanctification, which is why we make the sign of the Cross to sanctify ourselves. And the third is the fruit of glorification, for through the Cross, the gate to heaven is opened.

## On "Mixing Memory and Desire": A New Pattern for Preaching

Now, although many of us in the modern world might find Thomas's sermon style odd, for those who prefer short, compact, and yet doctrinally rich sermons to long, flowery speeches that go on for an hour or more, Thomas's sermons might seem like a Godsend. Sit and listen for ten minutes, and you go out with enough food-for-thought to keep you reflecting for days.

If done well, these sermons showed the skills of a speaker who had to

be smart, clever, and highly efficient—features understood and respected by the increasingly urbane medieval townspeople who had to listen to them. It is not that the busy townspeople of the Middle Ages did not want holiness, but simply that they generally wanted their holiness delivered in packages that were smart, clever, and highly efficient.

Thus, although it may seem odd to us now, Thomas's sermon style was actually considered thoroughly "modern" for its time—indeed, this style of sermon was actually called a "modern sermon" (a *sermo modernus*) as opposed to the *sermo antiquus* style that involved a verse-by-verse commentary on the entire Gospel—and it was a style of preaching that became very popular in the mid-thirteenth century. John of Wales, a Franciscan master at Paris around 1270, conveys in his *De arte praedicandi*, for example, that the older *sermo antiquus* style homily "did not sit particularly well with modern listeners, who liked to see the clear articulation of a sermon developed from a scriptural *thema*." And the Italian Dominican Fra Giacomo da Fusignano, prior of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, writes in 1290 that the old style was suitable only for preaching to the ignorant.[7] The type of sermon "more common to modern preachers," says Giacomo, was the sort we have seen St. Thomas preach, in which an opening biblical *thema* was divided into various parts.[8]

One of the great benefits of the *sermo modernus* style of preaching, moreover, was that it turned one or more of the biblical verses specified by the lectionary for a specific liturgical day into the means for what in the classical rhetorical tradition would have been called *inventio* (that is, finding and developing one's topic), *dispositio* (organizing one's material), and *memoria* (the remembering of one's material).

Recognizing this feature of the *sermo modernus* style sermon provides valuable context to help us understand more fully the famous story about Aquinas's inception *principium* address: *Rigans montes*. It is said that Thomas was nervous about his inception. As is generally well known, there had been a dispute between the secular masters and the mendicants. It was only due to the forceful intervention of Pope Alexander IV that the order was given that the mendicants be re-admitted straightaway to the faculty. Thomas was the one chosen to take the chair designated for the Dominicans, even though he was not yet the required age, being only

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7 Both passages quoted from Michèle Mulcahey, *First the Bow is Bent in Study: Dominican Education Before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1998), 403n10.

8 The preaching manuals of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries described dozens of possible ways of doing both *divisio* and *dilatatio*, many of which I describe and provide examples of in *Reading the Sermons of Thomas Aquinas*.

thirty-one or thirty-two while the University statutes stipulated that one should not incept before age thirty-five.

"Thomas was terribly upset," Weisheipl tells us in his biography of St. Thomas, basing his judgment on several contemporaneous sources. At first, the young friar "tried to excuse himself on the grounds of insufficient age and learning," but his efforts were for naught. "Since obedience left him no escape," writes Weisheipl, "he had recourse as usual to prayer."[9] What happened next is attested to by an equally large number of contemporary sources.[10] "With tears," reports Gui, Thomas begged "for inspiration as to the theme he should choose for his inaugural lecture." Afterward he fell asleep and seems to have had a very clear dream, in which, according to Gui:

> He seemed to see an old man, white haired and clothed in the Dominican habit, who came and said to him: "Brother Thomas, why are you praying and weeping?" "Because," answered Thomas, "they are making me take the degree of master, and I do not think I am fully competent. Moreover, I cannot think what theme to take for my inaugural lecture." To this the old man replied: "do not fear: God will help you to bear the burden of being a master. And as for the lecture, take this text, "Thou waterst the hills from thy upper rooms: the earth shall be filled with the fruit of thy works" [Rigans montes de suprioribus suis de fructu operum tuorum satiabitur terra]. Then he vanished, and Thomas awoke and thanked God for having so quickly come to his aid.[11]

Modern readers may remain skeptical about whether the source of the verse was St. Dominic—St. Thomas never identified the man—but it is noteworthy that Thomas does not get from the man in the dream what his subject matter should be or what points he should make. What comes to Thomas in the dream is simply the mnemonic text—the *thema* verse—that will serve as a structuring device for everything else that follows.

This is interesting for many reasons, not the least of which is that the

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9 See James Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Garden City. NY: Doubleday, 1974), 96.

10 See Foster, *Life of Saint Thomas*, *69*. So too, Jean-Pierre Torrell tells us: "The story has been transmitted by three different sources, all of which lead back to Thomas himself"; *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1 *The Person and His Work* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 51.

11 Quoted from Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas*, 96.

process is *unlike* that of the ancient Greek orators, who crafted their orations *first* and only *later* associated the points with their mnemonic structuring device, such as the rooms in their house or the particular sights on a walk around the city. It would likely never have occurred to an ancient orator to imagine that he could *create* a speech by taking his usual mnemonic walk around the house or the town. The topics of a prospective oration—a speech in the Senate, let us say, or a speech on behalf of a plaintiff in court—would have been entirely unrelated to the architectural elements and would have been associated with them only later when he was memorizing the speech.

Thomas and his contemporaries, by contrast, began with the mnemonic device as a way of discovering and developing their topics. In the ancient world, the process of "finding" the points (or topics) for a speech was called *inventio*, choosing how to develop or arrange those points into a coherent and persuasive whole was called *dispositio* (arrangement); these were distinct from the process of memorization which came later.[12] By the time Thomas was crafting his *principium*, the two processes had been united in a unique and important way, undoubtedly because the words of the biblical text were thought to possess a special fecundity that other mnemonic devices lacked. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere:

> Medieval preachers knew these five canons, as they had all studied their Quintillian, Cicero, and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. What the *sermo modernus* style offered them was a new method of *inventio*—that is, of discerning one's topic and one's approach to the topic. This was an *inventio* guided by the structure of the opening biblical *thema* verse by the meanings that could be associated with the words in it. The words of the verse suggested the topics to be covered, and the order of those words would determine the *dispositio*—or as the medievals called it, the *divisio*—of the parts of the speech. The *sermo modernus* style became popular precisely because it provided not only a method of *inventio*, of finding a topic— one keyed purposefully to the scriptural reading for the day—but also a method of constructing and ordering the material of the sermon. The whole process was designed to foster *memoria*, since the opening biblical verse functioned, as we have shown repeatedly, as an

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[12] The five canons of rhetoric, expressed in their most developed form in Quintillian's *Institutio Oratoria*, are *inventio* (invention), *dispositio* (arrangement), *elocutio* (style), *memoria* (memory), and *actio* (delivery).

elaborate mnemonic device to help the listeners associate the topics covered with the words in the verse.[13]

Thus, what we have been exploring here was a new sort of rhetoric—one that constituted a significant development on the classical rhetorical tradition handed down to the Middle Ages by the likes of Cicero and Quintillian. This new rhetoric of the Middle Ages was a rhetoric of *preaching*: a rhetoric based on Scripture and directed toward the goal of helping people hear the word of God more effectively in order to live it more faithfully.

## *Lectio* on the Scriptures with a View to Preparing Preachers for *Praedicatio*

Understanding Thomas's style of preaching has multiple benefits. First, not only will this help you read and understand Thomas's sermons more easily with better understanding, but also, since this "modern sermon" style of preaching was common in the thirteenth century, you will also have gained a valuable introduction to the sermons of pretty much any other preacher of the mid- to late-thirteenth century, such as St. Bonaventure, St. Albert the Great, Henry of Ghent, Giles of Rome, and others. And since the *sermo modernus* style remained popular for several centuries, learning to read the sermons of Aquinas intelligently provides a good introduction to the sermons of the late medieval and early Renaissance period in general.

A second benefit of learning how Thomas used the Bible as a structural and mnemonic device in his preaching is that, once Thomas had become a Master of the Sacred Page, one of his duties was to comment on the Scriptures, and for each of these scriptural commentaries, he wrote a prologue which was, in effect, a short sermon. So, understanding how Thomas structured and developed his sermons will also serve as a key to understanding how he wrote his biblical-commentary prologues, each of which is fascinating and theologically revealing in its own right, and most of which have been better preserved than many of his extant sermons.

And third, understanding these medieval sermons reveals that thirteenth-century biblical commentaries were devoted in large part to providing material for preaching. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear historians claim that thirteenth-century biblical commentaries are akin to Scholastic "disputed questions." They have come to this conclusion,

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[13] See Smith, *Reading the Sermons of Aquinas*, 168–69.

however, because they have failed to read these commentaries in light of the contemporary thirteenth-century *sermo modernus* style of preaching. My claim is that these biblical commentaries made constant use of the methods of the *sermo modernus* style and purposefully incorporated material that the master knew would be especially useful for students when they undertook the task of writing their own sermons.

While it is certainly the case that young, prospective preachers learned to preach by listening to preaching every day, they were also prepared to preach, I submit, *by the way they were taught the Scriptures*, a bit of wisdom from which we might benefit again today. Consider, as just one example, Thomas's comments from his early cursory commentary on Isaiah on the passage in Isa 62:1, which says "For Sion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for the sake of Jerusalem, I will not rest till her just one come forth as brightness." Noticing that it is God's "just one" who comes forth with "brightness" (*splendor*), Thomas comments, "Christ is brilliant" [*Christus splendet*]:

> First as the image of the Father: he is the brightness of his glory, and the figure of his substance (Heb 1:3); second, as the light of the saints: in the brightness of the saints before the day star I have begotten you (Ps 109:3); third, as the fullness of glory: his face shone like the sun (Matt 17:2); fourth, as upright teaching: the nations shall walk in your light, and kings in the brilliance of your rising (Isa 60:3).[14]

Note in this fourfold list that each item is accompanied by an associated biblical verse; this is a salient feature of *sermo modernus* style preaching.[15]

But there is more. As it so happens, one manuscript of the Isaiah commentary we possess was written in Thomas's own notoriously messy handwriting. In the margins of this manuscript, Thomas added some interesting annotations. In his biography of St. Thomas, Torrell called these marginal notes *collationes*, adding: "The word *collationes* makes us think immediately of notes for preaching."[16] Exactly, but I would like to suggest a different term: *distinctiones*. Why? Because collections of biblical *distinctiones* were a well-known popular preaching aid in the thirteenth century. They were usually arranged alphabetically and provided several

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[14] See *Super Isa* in Leonine ed. 28. All English translations are mine.

[15] I provide more examples in Randall Smith, *Aquinas, Bonaventure and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 207–15.

[16] Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:30.

meanings for a word, and for each meaning Scripture passages illustrating the use of the term in that sense.

One of the most popular works in this genre was the *Distinctiones super Psalterium* of Peter of Poitiers (†1215). In Peter's *Distinctiones*, for example, next to the word *lectus* ("bed"), one would find the following list.

> "Bed" is [said]:
>
> - *literally* in Scripture; as in the Song of Songs: "Our bed is flourishing, the beams of our houses are of cedar (Song 1:15–16);
> - of *contemplation*, as "There will be two men in one bed, one will be taken, and the other left (Luke 17:34);
> - of *the Church*, as: "In the bed of Solomon are sixty brave men" (Song 3:7);
> - of *conscience*, as: "I will wash my bed every night" (Ps 6:7);
> - *of carnal pleasure*, as in the same place according to another reading; or again: "You who sport on beds of ivory" (Amos 6:4); also: If I shall go up into the bed wherein I lie" (Ps 131:3);
> - of *eternal damnation*, as: "In darkness I have made my bed" (Job 17:13);
> - of *eternal beatitude*, as: My children are with me in bed." (Luke 11:7).[17]

Lists of *distinctiones* were not always published separately. They also often showed up in biblical commentaries. So, for example, Bonaventure's commentary on the Gospel of Luke included over thirty such lists, many of which he borrowed from the commentary on Luke by the Dominican Hugh of St. Cher (†1263).[18]

Lists of *distinctiones* were often printed in a fan-like fashion with the key term, such as *avis* (bird) or *lectus* (bed), at the left and the *distinctiones* spread out to the right. This, significantly, is what we find in Thomas's marginalia: the original word, for instance, "saints" (*sancti*), on the left,

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[17] Latin quoted from Philip S. Moore, *The Works of Peter of Poitiers: Master in Theology and Chancellor of Paris (1193–1205)* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1936), 79; trans. mine. For a good comparison of the *distinctiones* in the works of Peter of Poitiers, Peter the Chanter, and Prepositinus of Cremona, see Moore, *Peter of Poitiers*, 92–96. See also my discussion of these lists of *biblical distinctiones* in *Aquinas, Bonaventure and the Scholastic Culture*, 35–36.

[18] See Robert J. Karris, "St. Bonaventure's Use of *Distinctiones*: His Independence of and Dependence on Hugh of St. Cher," *Franciscan Studies* 60 (2002): 209.

with all the uses to which that word might be put fanning out to the right. (I provide this example below.) In other words, Thomas was creating his own lists of biblical *distinctiones* while preparing his commentary on Isaiah.

Consider just a few examples. Isaiah 44:3 contains the verse: "For I will pour out waters upon the thirsty ground, and streams upon the dry land: I will pour out my spirit upon thy seed." In the margin, Thomas has written:

The Spirit is given to beginners (*incipientibus*):

- at the start of their being made alive (*in principium vivificationis*): "The spirit came into them, and they lived, and they stood upon their feet" (Ezek 37:10);
- in the bath of restoration (*in lavacrum renovationis*): "by the bath of regeneration and restoration of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5);
- in the privilege of adoption (*in privilegium adoptionis*): "You have received the spirit of adoption of sons" (Rom 8:15).

[The spirit is given] to the advanced (*proficientibus*):

- for the instruction of the intellect (*ad instruendum intellectum*): "The Holy Spirit, the advocate, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you" (John 14:26);
- to refashion the passions (*ad reficiendum affectum*): "My spirit is sweet beyond honey" (Sir 24:27);
- to assist activity (*ad adiuvandum actum*): "The spirit helps our infirmity" (Rom 8:26).

[The Spirit is given] to the perfect (*perfectis*):

- as a benefit of freedom (*quasi beneficium libertatis*): "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17);
- as a bond of unity (*quasi vinculum unitatis*): "Careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3);
- as a pledge of inheritance (*quasi pignus haereditatis*): "You were signed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13).

Notice how these distinctions have been put into the useful categories of "good, better, best"—beginners, advanced, and perfect. This was a common method of dilating a word in a sermon.

Having made his way from "beginners" up to "the perfect," Thomas adds:

> The saints are:
>
> - chosen by predestination (*electi per praedestinationem*): "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4);
> - formed by the infusion of grace (*formati per gratiae infusionem*): "The Lord God formed man from the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen 2:7);
> - righteous by love (*recti per dilectionem*): "The righteous love you" (Song 1:3);
> - servants by the debt of service (*servi per debitum operationis*): "We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which we ought to do" (Luke 17:10).

I have included the Latin in parentheses here so you can take note of the parallelism of the phrases in the list. All the contemporary preaching manuals make clear that maintaining this parallelism was a fundamental requirement of the *sermo modernus* style. Note also that all this extensive theological content, nicely organized for easy incorporation into a sermon, was generated by dilating just one word: *spirit*.

## The Arts of Preaching in a University Culture Devoted to Dialectic

In conclusion: Let me suggest doing this kind of exercise—noticing the specific words in the biblical text, imagining the various uses of the word, and then finding places in the Scriptures where the word is used that way—and then doing it repeatedly was precisely the sort of thing that made someone like Thomas the wonderful preacher he would become.

Thomas, as a member of the Order of Preachers, did his part, both as a student and as a master, to realize one of the chief goals of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 to provide better, more orthodox, and more learned preaching: "The food of the word of God is above all necessary, because as the body is nourished by material food, so is the soul nourished by spiritual food, since 'not by bread alone does man live but in every

word that proceeds from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4)." And so the Council decreed that bishops should henceforth provide men "suitable for carrying out fruitfully the office of sacred preaching" ("idoneos ad sanctae praedicationis officium salubritere exequendum"), commissioning them to visit the people diligently in place of the bishop to instruct them, both by word and example.[19]

Even if dialectic and disputation were key motivating factors drawing students to Paris, Church authorities and the leaders of the new religious orders clearly viewed the emergence of this new educational institution, the medieval university, as an opportune place to train theologically well-formed and rhetorically well-trained preachers for preaching to the laity.[20] In Thomas, we find the fruit of that reform, a supremely wise Magister of the Sacred Page who was also a master of preaching.

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[19] See *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. J. Alberigo et al., 3rd ed. (Bologna, Italy: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 1973), internetsv.info/Archive/CLateranense4.pdf.

[20] I argue for this thesis in greater depth and detail in *Aquinas, Bonaventure and the Scholastic Culture*.

## Appendix: Outlines of Sermons 5 and 18

*Sermon 5:* Ecce rex tuus *(sermon on the first Sunday of Advent) (morning sermon and evening* collatio*)*

Morning

Thema:

*Ecce rex tuus venit tibi mansuetus* [*sedens super asinam*]. (Matt 21:5)
Behold your king comes to you, meek, [sitting upon an ass].

*Division of the* Thema:

Now on this Sunday the Church celebrates the first coming of Christ, and we can see four things in the verse mentioned above: (1) first, the manifestation of the coming of Christ, where it says: "**Behold**"; (2) second, who the one is that is coming, where it says: "**your king**"; (3) third, the benefit of his coming: "**comes for you**"; and (4) fourth, the way of his coming, where it says: "**meek**."

*Analytical Outline:*

Preliminary Distinction: There are four advents of Christ:

1. The one in which he came in the flesh,
2. The one in which he comes into the mind,
3. The one in which he comes at death, and
4. The one in which he will come at the judgment.

The first advent of Christ—the one in which he came in the flesh—is touched upon in the aforementioned words, in which we are able to see four things:

I. A demonstration of the coming of Christ, where it says **Behold**.
II. The condition of his coming, where it says **your king**.
III. The humility of his coming, where it says **meek**.
IV. The utility of his coming, where it says **he comes for you**.

(Note that Thomas has mixed up numbers 3 and 4 in this listing. In the Latin epigraph, *venit tibi* comes before *mansuetus*. Thomas has listed them here in reverse order. He will treat them in their correct order, however, in the evening *collatio* that finishes off the sermon.)

I. ***Ecce*** (Behold): Which indicates a demonstration of Christ's coming—
We can understand four things when we say the word '**behold**':

A) First, we can be asserting something certain:
"Just as people doubt in some manner concerning the second coming of Christ, so some doubted his first coming." Thus, in the first sense, the prophet says "**behold**," surely the Lord will come.

B) Second, we can be indicating a determination of time:
"Although the time of Christ's coming at the final judgment is not at a time determined for us, because God wished us to always be vigilant in good works, yet his coming in the flesh was at a determined time, and thus it is said '**behold**.'"

C) Third, we can be indicating the manifestation of a thing:
"So, although the coming of Christ into the mind is hidden, yet Christ's coming in the flesh was manifest and visible."

D) Fourth, the word "behold" can be used for the comforting of men, and this in two ways:

1. First, in victory over their enemies.
2. Second, in the attainment of the good:
We have obtained these two things in the coming of Christ: "we have peace and victory over the enemy, and we have joy from the hope obtained of future goods."

IIa. ***Rex*** (King)
There are four things that come with being a king:

1. First, a king suggests unity,
2. Second, a king has fullness of power,
3. Third, a king has an abundant jurisdiction, and
4. Fourth, a king brings equity of justice.

Each of these applies to Christ:

A) First, unity:
There must be unity for there to be kingship, otherwise, if there were many, dominion would not pertain to any one of

them. Thus we must reject Arius, "who was positing many gods, saying that the Son was other than the Father."

B) Second, fullness of power:
Laws are not imposed *on* him; rather, he has authority *over* the law. Which is why he can say, "You have heard it said of old, but I say to you," as if to say, "I am the true king who can establish the law for you."

C) Third, abundance of jurisdiction:
Whereas other kings have dominion over this town or those cities, all creatures have been made subject to Christ.

D) Fourth, equity of justice:
Whereas tyrants submit all things for the sake of their own utility, Christ orders all things to the common good. (Thus, "he comes *for you*.")

[End of material in morning Sermon]

### Sermon 5 *Collatio*
### (continuation later that evening at vespers)

IIb. ***Tuus*** (Your; Latin: *rex tuus*)
Christ is called "your king"—namely, the king *of man*—because of four things, namely:

1. Similitude of image,
2. Special love,
3. Solicitude of special and singular care, and
4. Conformity or society of human nature.

A) Similitude of image between Christ and man:
Every creature bears the image of God; nevertheless, man is more perfectly and especially was created in his image, not according to a corporeal likeness, but according to an intellectual likeness, in respect of the natural light impressed by God on the human mind. Thus, God sent his Son so that our image, deformed by sin, might be reformed by his grace.

B) Christ's special love for man:

Although Christ loves all things that are, he nevertheless specially loves men, and he has transferred man to the level of and equality with the angels.

C) Christ's solicitude and singular care for man:
Though God has care of all things, men are nevertheless specially subject to divine providence because they are ordered to life eternal.

D) Christ's conformity or society with our human nature:
God did not wish to give us a king who was of another kind—that is, of another nature—who would not be our brother.

III. ***Venit Tibi*** (He comes for you): Which deals with the utility of his coming—
He comes voluntarily, not under compulsion, not for his utility but for our need, for four reasons:

A) To manifest to us the divine majesty,

B) To reconcile us to God from whom through sin we were estranged as enemies,

C) To liberate us from slavery to sin, and

D) To give us a life of grace in the present and glory in the future.

IV. ***Mansuetus*** (meek): Which deals with the manner of his coming—
His meekness is shown in four ways:

A) In his way of life

B) In his correction of others

C) In his gracious acceptance of men (not only the just, but also sinners)

D) In his passion (to which he was led as a lamb)

## *Sermon 18:* Germinet terra
## *(sermon on the Feast of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, September 8)*
## *(morning sermon and evening* collatio*)*

### Morning

Thema:

*Germinet terra herbam virentem et proferentem semen, lignumque pomiferum faciens fructum*. (Gen 1:11)
Let the earth sprout forth the green plant that brings forth seed, and the fruit tree that bears fruit.

*Division of the* Thema:

These words reflect the divine disposition to provide for each and every thing according to what befits it. Hence God in his providence gave to man, because he is earthly, a remedy from the earth [*humanus*, earthly; derived from *humus*, from which is also derived "human"]. . . . Now a twofold medicine is put forth from the earth: the green plant and the fruit-bearing tree. The green plant is the Blessed Virgin, whose birth the Church is celebrating these days. [Editor's Note: Thomas does not, at this point, tell his audience what the "fruit-bearing tree" signifies. Later, in the evening *collatio*, however, he will make clear that "the fruit-bearing tree" is the Cross of Christ. See directly below.]

[From the *collatio*] The Most High has raised from the earth two remedies for us: **the green plant** and **the fruit-bearing tree**. We have spoken about **the plant**, which is the Blessed Virgin. Now it remains to speak about **the fruit-bearing tree**, the tree of the Cross of our Lord, which is to be venerated.

*Analytical Outline:*

I. ***Herbam virentem et proferentem semen*** (the green plant that brings forth seed): the Virgin Mary

   A) ***Herbam*** (plant)—regarding plants, we can consider three things:

      1. A plant is short in height:
         a) Signifies humility
         b) A tree is highly elevated from the earth (signifying pride)

and yet most firmly fixed in the earth. A plant, however, only clings a little to the earth, and its roots are just under the surface.

c) In a similar way, a proud man's heart is pinned to the earth, and he cannot come loose from the earth, although he makes himself very big and is elevated high. On the other hand, a humble man does not have anything on earth; therefore, his heart is easily removed from the earth. So in this way Mary is compared with a plant in regard to her moderation.

d) In the littleness of a humble plant the humility of Mary is commended.

2. A plant is pliant in slenderness:
   a) A heart is called pliant when it easily gives in (a virtuous and natural pliability of heart, as opposed to a vicious and unnatural one).
   b) The natural order requires that a lower thing gives in to an action of a higher thing; so too, the will or the heart of a human being is set between two:
      i. Something above itself: God
      ii. What is below it: the concupiscence of the flesh or the cupidity of the world
   c) The Virgin was obedient to the divine will and teaches obedience
   d) Obedience is a special virtue:
      i. Gregory: "It is the only virtue that plants the other virtues in the mind and protects the ones that have been planted."
      ii. Some whisper that it is better to be obedient with a spontaneous will rather than on the basis of a vow. This is not true.
   e) By the disobedience of one man, we are all sinners. So, it was becoming that we would be saved by obedience and that, just as the obedience of the Son began in the mother, so the Blessed Virgin was obedient.
3. A plant has medicinal strength:
   a) The human race was weak because of sin, and God wanted to apply the remedy of a medicine.
   b) Doctors show that their medicine works by first applying it to serious weaknesses.

c) The whole human race was feeble, and as for the woman, it seemed that it was completely corrupted.
d) And so the Lord, willing to show that his medicine was good, showed it in a woman first, in order to distribute it through a woman to others.
e) "The medicine of all people is in the swiftness of a cloud" (Sir 43:22): the strength of this medicine appeared swiftly in that the Blessed Virgin obtained grace in the maternal womb because she was sanctified in the womb from original guilt.

B) ***Virentem*** (green)—through virginity:

1. Moisture (since moisture is the cause of greenness):
   a) Just as every plant withers because of fire or the sun, so the concupiscence of the flesh makes the greenness of virginity wither.
   b) The greenness of virginity is nurtured by heavenly love: virginity is the result of God's grace with the freedom of the free decision.
   c) Because Mary had the fullness of the moisture of grace, it was her strongest resolution to live as a virgin forever.
2. Beauty (we see in greenness a beauty that delights):
   a) Order is what properly delights.
   b) The natural order of humankind is that the flesh is subject to the spirit.
   c) In the Virgin, nothing was disordered, neither in action nor in affection.
3. Utility (as long as a plant is green, there is hope that it will produce fruit):
   a) Similarly, someone who is green through virginity produces the fruit of love, but when he shrivels through concupiscence, his works are fruitless in view of eternal life.
   b) Because Mary had the greenness of virginity in an excellent way, she produced an amazing fruit: not only spiritual fruit, but also the fruit of her womb.

C) ***Proferentem semen*** (producing seed)—seed of three kinds:

1. Holy seed:
   a) It is holy because of its origin, God.
   b) It is characteristic of seed that it produces what is similar to that form from which it comes forth: children of God are brought about by the seed of God's Word.
2. Virtuous seed:
   a) The mustard seed is the tiniest and yet produces a great tree.
   b) The little seed is Christ, who was little on the Cross and grew so big that he filled heaven and earth.
3. Necessary seed:
   a) There is no salvation in anything else.
   b) This earth is the human nature destitute of the moisture of grace. Then how could it bring forth a plant? It was:
      i. Arid because of the concupiscence of sin.
      ii. Lowest because earth is below heaven.
   c) "And God said: Let the earth put forth the green plant":
      i. "He said" the word, meaning that he put forth the word that produced a fruit. "Wisdom has built a house for herself" in the Blessed Virgin.
      ii. Because it was arid, the Holy Spirit made it moist [cf. the discussion of virtuous seed above].
      iii. Because the earth was lowest, he gave himself to it and entered it, so as to make it the heavenly seed [cf. the discussion of holy seed above].

Therefore, if someone is empty through sin, let him ask for this plant, and he will be filled with good things. Likewise if someone is arid, let him take refuge with that Word, and he will be moistened. Likewise, if someone is downhearted, let him take refuge with that Word, and he will be led back to the heavenly light.

### Sermon 18 *Collatio*
### (continuation later that evening at vespers)

We have begun the solemn days of his Cross. It is very suitable to connect these two remedies, because the green plant has brought forth our salvation, whereas the fruit-bearing tree has sustained the plant and has exalted

it. Hence it says that Jesus's mother stood at the foot of the Cross. Let us look at this tree.

II. ***Lignumque pomiferum faciens fructum*** (and the fruit tree bearing fruit)—the tree of the Cross of Christ

Concerning the tree, Moses describes three things: (1) its appearance [*eius speciem*]: it is wood; (2) its adornment: it is fruit-bearing [*pomiferum*)]; and (3) what it produces: it produces fruit [*faciens fructum*].

A) ***Lignum*** (wood, tree)—it befits our remedy for three reasons:

1. It befits the wound: Just as "the human race is wounded because of disobedience, since the first man stole a fruit from the forbidden wood," so also "the new man has placed himself, as a salutary fruit so to speak, back onto the wood." The "forbidden tree" in the Garden is described as (a) good to eat from; (b) beautiful to the eyes; and (c) delightful to look at. The Cross is the medicine to each:
   a) Good to eat from: The wood of the Cross teaches the mortification of the flesh by which we are made alive. If you live according to the flesh, you will die (Rom 8:13).
   b) Beautiful to the eyes: There was worldly beauty in the forbidden tree. But the beauty of the first tree is completely changed into shame, whereas the shame of the Cross is completely changed into glory.
   Excursus: "See how the wood of the Cross is exalted."
   [Editor's Note: This comment allows Thomas to recount briefly the story of how the Byzantine emperor Heraclius re-captured the Cross from the Persians in the year 628 and eventually returned it to Jerusalem.]
   c) Delightful to look at: The delight of the flesh is not a true delight, since it has more about bitterness than about delight. If the just suffer adversities, the wood of the Cross makes these sweet. The Cross even makes one glory in adversity. Thus, the wood of the Cross befits the wound.
2. It befits the healing of the wound:
   a) The first evil of man occurred when Adam was thrown out of Paradise (Gen 3:22–24). What was the remedy? The Tree of Life. But because Adam was not permitted to approach the Tree of Life, he could not have the remedy.

Christ has taken up the wood for us: the Cross has become for us the "Tree of Life."

b) The second danger was the flood (Gen 6–8). The remedy came by means of the wood of Noah's ark.

c) The third danger came when the people of Israel were oppressed by the Egyptians (Exod 1:8–22). The remedy came by means of wood, since Moses struck the sea with a rod, dividing it and then reclosing it over the Egyptians.

d) It says in 1 Samuel 4:7 that the children of Israel fought against the Philistines and that the Ark of the Lord, which was made of wood, was brought into the camp. So, the wood befits the wound and the healing.

3. It befits the healer because Christ is exalted by the wood of the Cross:
   a) He is like a warrior and the Cross is his "triumphant chariot": this is the thing that elevates Christ.
   b) It is like the sedan chair of Solomon (see Song 3:9).
   c) It also is like the rod that guides the people.
   d) Moreover, he is exalted as a *magister* in his (wooden) seat of instruction.

B) ***Pomiferum*** (fruit-bearing)—the adornment of the tree: it is loaded with fruit (*onusta pomis*).
What are its fruits ["et quae sunt eius poma")?
* In Deut 33:13–15, in the blessing of Joseph, mention is made of three fruits: (1) the fruits of heaven, (2) the fruits of sun and moon, and (3) the fruits of eternal hills.

1. Which are the fruits of heaven? The members of Christ: not only the physical members of Christ's body, but those of his mystical body.
2. Which are the fruits of sun and moon? The examples of virtue which Christ has shown on the Cross:
   a) Love (No greater love than to lay down one's life for his friends; John 15:13)
   b) Humility (Humbled himself to death on a cross; Phil 2.8)
   c) Patience (when he was cursed but he did not curse; 1 Pet 2:23)

3. Which are the fruits of the eternal hills? The writings of teachers who are imbued with wisdom. On the Cross, Christ teaches:
   a) Faith: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matt 27:46)
   b) Hope: "Today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)
   c) Patience: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)
   d) Devotion: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46)
   e) How to live a human life together: "Woman, behold your son"; "Behold your mother." (John 19:26–27)

C) ***Fructum faciens***: fruit continually held by the wood
Now there are trees that have flowers and fruits all the time [*continue habent flores et fructus*]. In a similar way, the tree of the Cross has flowers all the time [*continue habet flores*]. See that the wood of the Cross has produced a triple fruit [*fructum*]:

1. The fruit of cleansing [*fructum purgationis*]: Through the Cross we are liberated from sins.
2. The fruit of sanctification: Man, alienated from God through sin, is reconciled through Christ. Thus we make the sign of the cross to sanctify ourselves.
3. The fruit of glorification: Through sin, humankind is excluded from paradise, and therefore, Christ has suffered on the Cross so that, through the Cross, the gate from the earthly things to the heavenly things would be open. Hence, the Cross of Christ is signified by the ladder that Jacob saw whose top reached the heavens. All the saints go up to the heavens by the power of the Cross.