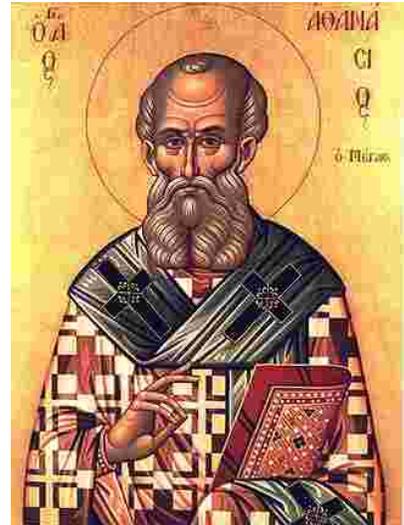


ATHANASIUS

Bishop of Alexandria, ca. 295-373

Feast Day: 2 May

Collect: Uphold your Church, O God of truth, as you upheld your servant Athanasius, to maintain and proclaim boldly the catholic faith against all opposition, trusting solely in the grace of your eternal Word, who took upon himself our humanity that we might share his divinity; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Facts:

- Ordained a deacon in 319 CE, at age 24
- Arius, a prominent presbyter and theologian, was gaining support for denying the full divinity of the 2nd person of the Trinity—Athanasius opposed him and gained fame
- Served as secretary and advisor to Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, at the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325 CE
- Campaigned at Nicaea for the phrase “of one Being with the Father” in the Nicene Creed (homoousious)
- Became bishop in 328 when Alexander died
- Fierce advocate of Nicene Christology, arguing vociferously against church and state authorities alike—five times sent into exile
- Citizens of Alexandria threatened to riot if the Emperor didn’t bring him back out of exile
- Known for his diverse and ample writings, from sermons and letters to theological and biblical treatises
- *On the Incarnation of the Word of God* is his most famous work, regarded as a classic
- Gregory of Nazianzus called him “the pillar of the Church,” and Basil the Great said he was “the God-given physician of all her wounds”

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Fierce defender of orthodoxy, often seemed to stand alone: “Athanasius contra mundum” (Athanasius against the world) was a catchphrase of the time
- Major architect of the Trinity as a bedrock principle of Christianity
- Devoted to the concepts of the Word Become Flesh, pastoral care as primal in the work of the Church, and monasticism
- Athanasian Creed was not written by him, but written in the 5th century and attributed to him
- 39th Festal Letter, written in 367 CE, became the major document setting the New Testament canon (which books got into the Bible)
- His *Life of Antony* was hugely influential on the development of the monastic ascetic ideal (fighting demons in the desert, etc)

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- What is your Christology? How did you come by it? Why does Christology matter?
- What implications would we draw if we decided Jesus Christ was not divine and co-equal with the Father?
- 20th century Catholic theologian Karl Rahner calls the Trinity the least known and least appreciated doctrine of the Church, saying, “We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.”
What does the Trinity mean to you? Why is it important?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

AUGUSTINE

Bishop of Hippo & Theologian, 354-430

Feast Day: 28 August

Collect: Lord God, the light of the minds that know you, the life of the souls that love you, and the strength of the hearts that serve you: Help us, following the example of your servant Augustine of Hippo, so to know you that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Facts:

- Considered to be one of if not the greatest Western Christian theologian, as well as having a compelling personal faith journey
- Born in North Africa, was attracted by various philosophies and consumed by inner moral struggle, particularly over sexuality: famous prayer was, “Lord, make me chaste, but not yet.”
- Pursued education in rhetoric, quickly successful
- Was influenced by his mother, Monica, to become a Christian in 386, baptized by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, on Easter Eve in 387
- Returned to North Africa in 391, unexpectedly chosen by the people of Hippo to become a priest
- Chosen as bishop four years later—led a monastic life while a bishop, earning him title of patron saint of regular clergy
- Prolific writer
- Had a fifteen year affair with a Carthaginian woman before he became a celibate priest, separating from her was very painful for him
- His *Confessions* is a classic of Western spirituality

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Taught in opposition to the Manichaeans, who attempted to solve the problem of evil by assuming there was a person/force/entity forever opposed to God
- In refutation, Augustine affirmed that all creation is essentially good, having been created by God
- Therefore, evil is essentially the absence of good
- Helped formulate the doctrine of Original Sin
- Made major contributions to just war theory
- Influential on Reformation theologians, especially Luther, due to his teachings on salvation and grace
- One of his most controversial doctrines is the *Filioque* clause of the Nicene Creed: does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father and the Son or just the Father? This is one of the major splits between Eastern and Western Christianity
- Taught that if a literal interpretation of scripture contradicts our God-given reason, a metaphorical interpretation should be used

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- What is your relationship with Original Sin? Do you find it helpful or unhelpful as a doctrine? What is the cost or value of getting rid of it? Of keeping it? What about balancing it with Original Blessedness?
- What is your relationship with theodicy (the problem of evil)? Why do bad things happen to good people? Is there an independent source of evil in the world, or is evil simply an absence of good?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

ANSELM

Archbishop of Canterbury, ca. 1033-1109

Feast Day: 21 April

Collect: Almighty God, you raised up your servant Anselm to teach the Church of his day to understand its faith in your eternal Being, perfect justice, and saving mercy: Provide your Church in every age with devout and learned scholars and teachers, that we may be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- Benedictine monk, abbot, philosopher and theologian
- Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109
- Sometimes credited as the founder of Scholasticism (method of learning used in medieval times that places a strong emphasis on dialectical reasoning to extend knowledge by inference)
- Most famous for his ontological argument for the existence of God, and the satisfaction theory of atonement
- Wanted to enter a monastery at age 15 but was forbidden by his father, endured a serious, possibly psychosomatic illness afterwards (finally entered at age 27)
- Under his leadership, the Abbey at Bec (in France) became the foremost seat of learning in Europe, attracting students from France, Italy and elsewhere
- Did not want to become Archbishop of Canterbury amid a volatile political climate—clerics gathered at court, forced a crozier into his hands, and bodily carried him to a nearby church while singing a *Te Deum*
- Exiled twice for resistance to English kings William II and Henry I
- Concentrated the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury over all other English and Welsh bishops

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Taught monastic ideals of stewardship, prudence, proper instruction, prayer and contemplation
- His writings attempt to arrive a Christian truth by means of rational argument rather than faith in revelation—motto of “faith seeking understanding”
- Ontological argument as explained by *Holy Women, Holy Men*: “God is that than which nothing greater can be thought. Even the fool, who (in Psalm 14) says in his heart ‘There is no God,’ must have an idea of God in his mind, the concept of an unconditional being (ontos) than which nothing greater can be conceived; otherwise he would not be able to speak of ‘God’ at all. And so this something, ‘God,’ must exist outside the mind as well; because, if he did not, he would not in fact be that than which nothing greater can be thought. Since the greatest thing that can be thought must have existence as one of its properties, Anselm asserts, ‘God’ can be said to exist in reality as well as in the intellect, but is not dependent upon the material world for verification.”
- HWHM on satisfaction theory of atonement: “If a vassal breaks his bond, he has to atone for this to his lord; likewise, sin violates a person’s bond with God, and atonement or satisfaction must be made. Of ourselves, we are unable to make such atonement, because God is perfect and we are not. Therefore, God himself has saved us, becoming perfect man in Christ, so that a perfect life could be offered as satisfaction for sin.”

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- What do you make of the ontological proof of God and the satisfaction theory of atonement? Do they make sense to you? Do you find them spiritually valuable?
- What is the relationship of reason to faith? How do they work together? Where are they stronger alone?

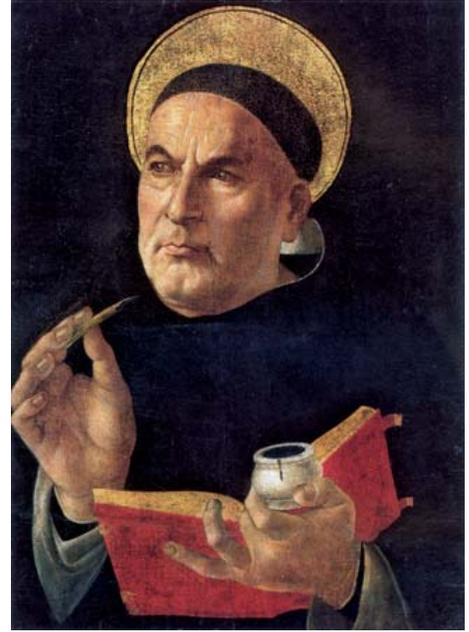
My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

THOMAS AQUINAS

Priest & Theologian, ca. 1225-1274

Feast Day: 28 January

Collect: Almighty God, you have enriched your Church with the singular learning and holiness of your servant Thomas Aquinas: Enlighten us more and more, we pray, by the disciplined thinking and teaching of Christian scholars, and deepen our devotion by the example of saintly lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- The premier medieval Christian thinker, and next to Augustine, perhaps the greatest Western theologian ever
- Pillar of Scholastic theology
- From a high-born Italian family, who did not want him to become a monk—when he left to join the Dominican Order of Preachers at age 19, he was kidnapped on the journey by his own brothers and held prisoner in one of the family's castles for almost a year. During that year, his brothers hired a prostitute to seduce him away from his celibate commitment—he is said to have warded her off with a fire iron
- Greatest works include *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*
- Considered a bold thinker and even a radical in his time
- A great deal of modern philosophy, including secular philosophy, has roots in his ideas of ethics, natural law, metaphysics and political theory
- Wrote several Eucharistic hymns, including “O saving Victim,” and “Now, my tongue, the mystery telling”
- Died in 1274, just under 50 years of age

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Asserted that reason and revelation are in basic harmony: “Grace (revelation) is not the denial of nature (reason) but the perfection of it.”
- Understood God’s disclosure of the Divine Name, “I Am Who I Am” in Exodus 3:14, to mean that God is Being, the Ultimate Reality from which everything else derives its being
- Although human reason can deduce a lot about the Creator by observing the Creation (this is called natural theology and Aquinas was a major proponent of it), there are certain Christian truths, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, that are only accessible by revelation
- Toward the end of his life, began having mystical, emotional experiences of God completely different from his life-long pursuit of understanding God by reason. He heard Jesus say to him as he prayed before an icon, “You have written well of me, Thomas. What reward would you have for your labor?” Aquinas answered, “Nothing but you, Lord.” Eventually he quit work on the *Summa Theologica* and when his secretary begged him to keep dictating, he said, “I cannot, because all that I have written seems like straw to me.”

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- What is the relationship between rational and mystical experience of God? What is the value of each? Do you find yourself more often thinking about God or feeling God? How could you explore the opposite approach?
- What can we learn about God from Creation, from nature, one another, and everyday life?
- What makes a theological truth valid? Reason? Revelation? Both?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics: