

*Sweet Jesus, Body and Blood most Holy,
be the delight and pleasure of my soul,
my strength and salvation in all temptations,
my joy and peace in every trial,
my light and guide in every word and deed,
and my final protector in death. Amen.*

That prayer was written by St Thomas Aquinas, and today, 28th January is his saint's day. If you want an intelligent answer to any intelligent question to do with Christianity, St Thomas Aquinas is the man to turn too. He was born nearly 800 years ago, and during his life he wrote vast tomes of answers to many of the trickiest questions about faith. The saint explained his answers logically and succinctly, and even gives you a yes or no answer. His *magnum opus* was the *Summa Theologiae*. There are well-thumbed copies of his books in the monastery library, the large building of glass and concrete that you may have seen off Abbey Drive, containing hundreds and thousands of books.

I think St Thomas Aquinas spoke and wrote with authority, because his whole life was devoted to prayer and study. He learned theology in the great university of Paris, a place of learning that makes Oxford and Cambridge seem modern, never mind Bristol or Bath. Then he lived and prayed in a Dominican Friary in Italy during the 13th century. St Thomas Aquinas is someone who spent his whole life searching for truth, praying for truth, and then writing down the truth to help others to think things through. Our search for truth at school or in life, helps us to understand God's world. St Thomas Aquinas is the patron saint of Academic endeavour.

Saints who were very good teachers are known as Doctors of the Church. The patron saint of this minor basilica is a Doctor of the Church also, that's St Gregory the Great. St Thomas often mentions in his writings the lessons of St Gregory and other Doctors, to build on what they taught. We do well to listen to our teachers, those with us today and those from of old: because they inform us, even if our own thinking reaches different conclusions. St Thomas realised that so many had spoken with authority before him, including his best teacher, St Albert the Great. He knew he stood on the shoulders of giants. Wise man.

But the person St Thomas Aquinas, St Gregory the Great and all the Church's doctors believed in and followed, was the person of Jesus Christ. Members of the Church only speak with

genuine authority when they speak in his name, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Wise Christians rely on God's authority, not their own. That's why Jesus started the Church, so that His truth may be heard throughout the earth. The Catholic Church only teaches with authority because it was given by Christ. Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit, to bring us gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. We know from the gospel today the powerful effect Jesus had on those who listened to him in the synagogue. The Spirit of the Lord was with him. So his teaching made a deep impression on them because, he taught them with authority.

The wonderful sending of Jesus into our world was promised in our first reading. Jesus is God's answer to the prayer we sang so many times at the beginning of Mass: *Save us, O Lord our God!* God promised to Moses and the people that he would raise up a prophet for them; God said: *I will put my words into his mouth and he shall tell them all I command him.* Jesus once said: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me by my Father.*

Speaking with authority is something that is missing these days. It seems impossible to believe anything without checking it first. Nobody is taken at their word and nobody is believed on their own authority; neither politician nor doctor, teacher nor priest. We live in a society that is deeply sceptical. It means we find it difficult to trust others, and not to believe what we read and hear. Donald Trump is not the only one worried about fake news. Most people will only believe things they can prove for themselves.

So how may we learn to detect truth, and to speak with authority ourselves, so that people will believe us, and trust us? The example of saints helps us. They spoke with authority, not merely because they were clever. Their authority was gained not through A*s or grade 9s, but found through the extent that they loved God and their neighbour. The Fifth form will know from their retreat that even *if I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.* St Thomas Aquinas knew this. The humble saint described his own work as straw, compared to what he would experience in heaven. But near the end of the life had a mystical experience of Jesus who said to him: *You have written well of me, Thomas.* Therefore the last words go to St Thomas Aquinas; and a prayer the saint said every day:

Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you. Amen.