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The Homily at the Mass Commemorating the 700th Anniversary of the Death of Thomas Aquinas, Immaculate Conception Chapel, University of Dayton, March 7, 1974

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The Homily at the Mass Commemorating the 700th Anniversary of the Death of Thomas Aquinas, Immaculate Conception Chapel, University of Dayton, March 7, 1974

Most Reverend Joseph L. Bernardin,
Archbishop of Cincinnati

It is indeed a joy for me to be with you this evening to celebrate this Mass which, in a sense, is the highlight of this Week commemorating the 700th anniversary of the death of St. Thomas Aquinas. It was with interest that I read the brochure outlining the various seminars and lectures which delve into so many aspects of Aquinas' extraordinary contribution to the Church's intellectual life these past seven centuries. The genius of Thomas Aquinas lay, of course, in his exceptional ability to synthesize the best of the world's thinking with the values of the Gospel as understood and handed on by the Church. It is not my intention to review the highlights of this remarkable synthesis in this brief homily; it is precisely to do this that the Aquinas Week was planned. I would like, however, to single out several general qualities of St. Thomas which can be very useful, I think, for all of us today.

First, it must be remembered that Thomas was a true intellectual. He was intensely interested in science, philosophy and theology—all of which, after a rather long dormant period, were beginning to come to life and to attract attention during his formative years. It soon became evident to Thomas that God had given him great talents and he chose to serve God and the Church by developing and using those talents to the fullest extent possible. Never did he consider intellectualism to be an obstacle to the Church's mission. On the contrary, by his prodigious research and writing, he proved that the intellectual life can be an important and indeed indispensable, aspect of the Church's life and mission.

This can indeed be an important lesson for us. Throughout the history of the Church there have been individuals and movements which have downgraded the pursuit of knowledge. Even today, we can detect this trend in some who insist, in a rather exaggerated fashion, on a simplistic or fundamentalist approach to life. In no way should we look down on those who are not psychologically or intellectually prepared for the complexities or the sophistication of the intellectual life. At the same time, we must not permit the impression to be given that the pursuit of knowledge is somehow dangerous or inimical to man's well-being.

A difficulty we face in the Church today is the fact that there is a great deal of "fuzzy" thinking. There are some who would like to speak—and, unfortunately, do speak—with an air of authority. But frequently, we find that they have not done

their homework. Instead of critically evaluating the newer ideas and theories to determine what is of substance in them, they sometimes simply parrot what others have said. Thank God, we have some, but we need more people like Thomas Aquinas who not only have keen minds but also have the will to do what is necessary to make those minds truly fertile. Only in this way will we be assured of that clear thinking that is so needed if we are not to obscure God's divinely revealed message.

A second quality of Thomas Aquinas, and very much related to the first, was his humility—a humility which stemmed from his deep faith. He never forgot that it was God who created him and who gave him his talents. He never forgot that he exercised those talents in God's service and that of His Church. He never permitted himself to be deluded by pride into thinking that somehow he was answerable to no one but himself. Thomas was able, because of his faith and humility, to live a life in which his brilliant mind and his profound spirituality could not only live together in an integral fashion but also support and sustain each other.

This marvelous integration of the intellectual and the spiritual in Thomas was given visible expression in his many prayers. There is one prayer attributed to him that I would like to recite for you as a conclusion to this homily. Whether or not he actually wrote it, it surely captures his spirit. I simply ask that you make it your own, so that you may also achieve that perfect balance which was his.

"O Lord my God, make me obedient without argument, poor without embarrassment, chaste without prudishness, patient without complaint, humble without hypocrisy, joyful without silliness, mature without grouchiness, eager without thoughtlessness, reverent without servility, truthful without guile, forceful without presumption, willing to correct my brother without superiority, and to help him by word and deed without pretense.

Grant me, O Lord, a watchful heart which no idle thought will ever turn away from You; a noble heart which no unworthy desire will ever debase; a righteous heart which no bad intention will ever turn aside; a strong heart which no sorrow will ever crush; a free heart which no violent passion will ever capture.

Finally, O Lord my God, give me understanding to know You, diligence to seek You, wisdom to find You, a style of life to please You, perseverance to wait for You, and faithfulness to hold fast to You. Let me accept the crosses of this life in penitence, the blessings in grace, and the eternal joys to come in glory. Through Christ, Our Lord."

Most Reverend Joseph L. Bernardin
Archbishop of Cincinnati