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First Advent Sermon 2018

GOD IS!

Holy Father, Venerable Fathers, brothers and sisters, in the Church we are so pressed with tasks to perform, problems to confront, and challenges to respond to that we risk losing sight of, or leaving in the background, the “*porro unum* *necessarium*,” the “one thing is needful” of the gospel (Lk 10:42), which is our personal relationship with God. Moreover, we know from experience that an authentic personal relationship with God is the first requirement in dealing with all the situations and problems that come up without us losing our peace and patience.

I have decided, therefore, to set aside every other theme and any reference to current problems. Let us try to do what St. Angela of Foligno recommended to her spiritual children: let us “recollect ourselves in God and [plunge] our whole soul in the divine infinity.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Let us take a bath of faith each morning before beginning the day’s work.

The theme for these Advent sermons (and, God willing, also for Lent), will be a verse from a psalm: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:2). People today are passionate in searching for signs of the existence of intelligent beings on other planets. It is a legitimate and understandable search. Few, however, search for and study the signs of the Living Being who has created the universe, who entered into its history, and who lives in it. “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). We have the real Living One in our midst, and we overlook him to search for hypothetical beings who, in the best of cases, could do very little for us and certainly could not save us from death.

How many times are we forced to say to God, with St. Augustine, “You were with me, but I was not with you.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Unlike us, the living God in fact seeks for us and has done nothing other than that since the creation of the world. He continues to call out, “Adam, where are you?” (see Gen 3:9). Let us decide to attend to the signs of this living God, to respond to his call, to “knock on his door,” to enter into new and lively contact with him.

We rely on Jesus’ saying: “Seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matt 7:7). When we read these words, we immediately think that Jesus promises to give us all the things we ask for, and we are perplexed because we see this rarely happens. However, he did intend to say one thing above all: “Seek me and you will find me; knock and I will open the door.” He promises to give himself, above and beyond the small things we ask of him, and this promise is always infallibly kept. Whoever seeks him finds him; he will open to whoever knocks, and once someone has found him, everything else is secondary.

The soul that thirsts for the living God is guaranteed to find him and with him will find everything else in him, as the words of St. Teresa of Avila remind us:

**Let nothing disturb you,  
Let nothing frighten you,  
All things pass away:  
God never changes.  
Patience obtains all things.  
He who has God  
Finds he lacks nothing;  
God alone suffices.**[[3]](#footnote-3)

With thesethoughts in mind let us begin our journey in search of the face of the living God.

**Turn Back to Things Themselves!**

The Bible is punctuated with texts that speak of God as “living.” Jeremiah says, “He is the living God” (10:10); God himself says in Ezekiel, “As I live, says the Lord God . . .” (33:11). In one of the most beautiful psalms in the psalter, written during the exile, the psalmist exclaims, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (42:2), and in another psalm, “My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God” (84:2). Peter, at Caesarea of Philippi, proclaims that Jesus is “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16).

This obviously deals with a metaphor drawn from human experience. Israel was constrained to use it to distinguish their God from the idols of the other nations that were “dead” divinities. In contrast to them, the God of the Bible is “a God who breathes” and his breathing or breath (*ruah*) is the Holy Spirit.

After the long ascendancy of idealism and the triumph of the “idea”, in recent times even secular thinking warned about the need for a return to “reality” and expressed that in the motto for its program: “turn backto things themselves.”[[4]](#footnote-4) It means not stopping at the formulations about reality, the theories built on that, or what is commonly accepted about it, but focusing directly on the reality itself that underlies everything; it means removing the various layers of earth deposited on top of it and discovering the rock underneath.

We need to apply this approach to the sphere of faith as well. In fact St. Thomas Aquinas has written about faith, “It does not stop at formulations but at realities.”[[5]](#footnote-5) When it is a question of the supreme “reality” in the sphere of faith, that is, God, “turning back to things themselves” means turning back to the living God; it means breaking through, so to speak, the terrible wall of the idea that we have made of him and running, with open arms, to encounter God in person. It means discovering that God is not an abstraction, but a reality, that there is the same difference between our ideas of God and the living God as between a sky painted on a sheet of paper and the real sky.

The program to “turn back to things themselves!” has had an application that is justifiably famous: the one that led to a discovery that things . . . exist. It is worth rereading the famous passage from Jean-Paul Sartre:

I was in the park just now. The roots of the chestnut tree were sunk in the ground just under my bench. I couldn’t remember it was a root any more. The words had vanished and with them the significance of things, their methods of use, and the feeble points of reference which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, stooping forward, head bowed, alone in front of this black, knotty mass, entirely beastly, which frightened me. Then I had this vision.

It left me breathless. Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of “existence.” I was like the others, like the ones walking along the seashore, all dressed in their spring finery. I said, like them, “The ocean is green, that white speck up there is a seagull,” but I didn’t feel that it existed or that the seagull was “an existing seagull”; usually existence hides itself. It is there, around us, in us, it is us, you can’t say two words without mentioning it, but you can never touch it. . . . And then all of a sudden, there it was, clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The philosopher who made this “discovery” declared himself to be an atheist and therefore did not go beyond the observation that “I exist, the world exists, and things exist.” We, however, can start from this experience and make it a trampoline for the discovery of another Existing One, the spark that makes possible another illumination. What was possible with the root of the chestnut, why couldn’t it in fact be possible with God? Is God perhaps less real for the mind of a human being than the root of the chestnut is for an eye? The Fathers did not hesitate to put insights into truth from pagan philosophers at the service of faith, even those insights that were intentionally used against Christians. We need to imitate them and do the same thing for our time.

What then can we retain from the “illumination” of this philosopher? There is no direct application or content but only an indirect and procedural application. Read with a certain graced disposition, this narrative seems intentionally written to shake us out of our mental routine, to arouse in us at first the suspicion, and then the certainty, that there exists a knowledge of God that is still unknown to us . . . that perhaps before now we have never even realized what it means that God “exists,” that he is an existing God or, as the Bible says, a living-God. We therefore have a task before us, a discovery to make: to discover that God “is,” and so much so that we too for an instant have our breath taken away! It would be the adventure of a lifetime.

What can help us understand what this means is the experience of some converted people to whom the existence of God was suddenly revealed at a certain point in life after they tenaciously ignored or denied it. One such person was the French journalist André Frossard who died on February 2, 1995. This is how he describes his life before conversion:

God did not exist. His image, the images which remind one of his existence and of the existence of what one would call his descendants in time, the saints, the prophets, the heroes of the Bible were not mentioned at all in our homes. None of us spoke about him. We were perfect atheists, the kind that no longer ever question their atheism. The militant anti-clericals who still survived and spent their time speaking at public meetings against religion seemed to us rather touching and rather ridiculous as might an historian intent on debunking the tale of Little Red Riding Hood.[[7]](#footnote-7)

One summer day, tired of waiting for a friend with whom he had an appointment, the young Frossard entered a nearby church, observed its architecture, and looked at the people praying there. And this is how he narrates what happened:

First, were the words: spiritual life. They were not said to me, nor did I form them in my mind; it was as though they were being spoken by someone close to me who was seeing something which I had not yet seen. The last syllable had hardy brushed my conscious mind when an avalanche descended upon me. . . . How can I describe what took place in words which refuse to carry the sense . . .? I apprehended . . . a different world, whose brilliance and density made our world seem like the wraith of an unfulfilled dream. What I saw was reality; this was truth and I was seeing it from the dim shore on which I still stood. Now I knew that there is order in the universe and at its beginning, beyond the shining mists, the manifestation of God: a manifestation which is a presence, which is a person, the person whose existence I should have denied a moment ago. . . . This surging, overwhelming invasion brought with it a sense of joy comparable to that of a drowning man who is rescued at the last moment.[[8]](#footnote-8)

When he left the church his friend, seeing that something had happened, asked him, “What happened to you?” He answered, “I am Catholic” and as if he was afraid of not having been sufficiently explicit, he added “Roman and apostolic.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

The expression that best expresses this event is “becoming aware of God.”

“Becoming aware” indicates an unexpected opening of our eyes, a startling jolt to our consciousness by which we begin to see something that was already there but that we did not see before.

Let us reread, in line with the “illumination” described by Sartre, the episode of the burning bush. It will help us ascertain, among other things, how even modern “existential” thinking can help us discover something new in the Bible that ancient thinking, oriented in an ontological direction, despite all its richness, was not able to grasp.

The passage in the Bible that recounts the event of the burning bush (Ex 3:1ff) is itself a burning bush. It burns but is not consumed. It has not lost any of its power after thousands of years to transmit the sense of the divine. It shows, better than any discourse could, what happens when someone truly encounters the living God. “Moses said, ‘I will turn aside . . . .’” He is still thinking and exercising his will. He is still his own master. He is the one who is in charge (or believes he is in charge) of what is taking place. But now God bursts onto the scene and imposes his law. “Moses, Moses, Do not come near. . . . I am the God of your father.” Everything has immediately changed. Moses suddenly becomes docile and submissive. “Here I am!” he answers, and he hides his face, like the Seraphim who cover their faces with their wings (see Is 6:2). The “numinous” is in the air. Moses enters into the mystery.

In this atmosphere God reveals his name: “I AM WHO AM.” This phrase, transplanted on the soil of Hellenistic culture by the Septuagint, was interpreted as a definition of what God is, the absolute Being, as an affirmation of his most profound essence. But such an interpretation, say today’s exegetes, is “altogether out of keeping with [the thinking of] the Old Testament” and instead the phrase means, “I am the one who is there” or even more simply, “I am here (or I will be here) for you.”[[10]](#footnote-10) This is a concrete affirmation, not an abstract one; it refers more to the existence of God than to his essence, or more to his “being here” than to “what he is.” We are not far from “I live,” and “I am the Living One,” that God says in other parts of the Bible.

Moses thus discovered a very simple thing that day, but one that was capable of setting into motion and sustaining the whole process of liberation that would follow. He discovered that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob exists. He is, and he is a reality that is present and operative in history, someone who can be relied on. After all, that was what Moses needed to know at that moment—and not an abstract definition of God.

There is something that is common to the experience of the philosopher before the root of the chestnut tree and that of Moses before the burning bush. Both discovered the mystery of being: the first man discovered the being of things, and the second man, the Being of God. But while the discovery that God exists is the source of courage and joy, the mere discovery that things exist does not produce anything, according to the saying of the philosopher, but “nausea.”

**God, the Feeling of a Presence**

What does it mean and how do we define the living God? For a moment I considered answering that question and outlining a profile of God, starting with the Bible, but then I saw that would have been very foolish. Wanting to describe the living God and delineating his profile, even though it would be based on the Bible, is to fall into the temptation again of reducing the living God to the *idea* of the living God.

What we can do in facing the living God, is to transcend “the feeble points of reference which men have traced on the surface,” to break the small husks of our ideas about God, of the “alabaster jars” in which we keep him enclosed, so that his perfume expands and “fills the house.” St. Augustine is a master at doing this. The saint has left us a kind of method to lift our hearts and minds to the living and true God. It consists in repeating to ourselves, after every reflection on God, “This is not God. . . . This is not God!”[[11]](#footnote-11) We think about the earth, about the sky, about angels or about any other thing or person, and finally we think about what we ourselves think about God and repeat every time, “Yes, but this is not God , this is not God!” All the creatures contemplated respond, one by one, “Seek higher than us!” We need to believe in a God who is beyond the God in whom we believe!

A living God, insofar as he is living, can be vaguely sensed; we can have a kind of inkling or intuition about that. It can arouse a desire, a longing. But more than that, no. Life cannot be enclosed in an idea. Through this one can more easily have a sense or an inkling about him rather than an idea about him, since an idea puts the person in a box while the feeling reveals a person’s presence, leaving intact a person’s wholeness and indeterminacy. St. Gregory of Nyssa, speaks of the highest form of the knowledge of God as a “feeling of presence.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

The divine is in a category that is absolutely different from any other: it cannot be defined but only alluded to; it can only be spoken of through analogies and contrasts. One image in the Bible that speaks of God this way is that of the rock. Few biblical titles are able to create in us such a vivid feeling about God—especially of what God is for us—than this image of God-as-rock. Let us try, as Scripture says, “to suck honey from the rock” (Deut 32:13).

More than being simply a title, “rock” appears in the Bible as a kind of personal name of God, so much so that at times it is written with a capital letter: “The Rock, his work is perfect” (Deut 32:4); “The Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal” (Is 26:4, NIV). But in order for this image not to cause fear and dread because of the hardness and impenetrability it evokes, the Bible immediately adds another truth: he is “our” rock, “my” rock. He is a rock for us, not against us. “The LORD is my rock” (Ps 18:2), “a rock of refuge for me” (Ps 31:2), “the rock of our salvation” (Ps 95:1). The first translators of the Bible, the Seventy, were startled by such a physical image of God that seemed to debase him, so they systematically substituted the concreteness of “rock” with abstractions like “strength,” “refuge,” “salvation.” All the modern translations have restored the original name of “rock” to God, and rightly so.

The title of rock is not an abstract title; it says not only what God is but also what we ourselves should be. A rock is made to be climbed, for people to seek refuge there, and not just to be contemplated from afar. The rock draws us to itself, it fascinates us. If God is a rock, then we need to become a “rock climbers.” Jesus said, “Learn from the steward of the household” (see Lk 12:42ff); “Look at the fishermen” (see Mk 1:16ff); St. James continues this kind of instruction and says, “Look at the farmers” (see Jas 5:7). We can add, “Look at the rock climbers!” If night falls and a storm arises, people do not make the imprudent mistake of attempting to go down, but they cling even more to the rock and wait until the storm passes.

The Bible’s insistence on God-as-rock has the goal of instilling confidence in people, driving out fear from their hearts. “We will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;” says Psalm 46:2, and the reason given is that “the God of Jacob is our refuge” (v. 7). This is the state of mind expressed in the hymn “God Is Our Fortress and Our Rock” that has contributed so much to shape religious sentiment in the Protestant world. One single fear remains before this God-as-rock, but it is not exactly a fear. It is reverential fear: the holy fear of God.

**God Is and That Suffices!**

The first biographer of St. Francis of Assisi, Thomas Celano, describes a moment of darkness and discomfort that the saint experienced at the end of his life as he saw around him deviations from the original lifestyle of his brothers. He writes,

Once when he was disturbed over bad examples and, thus distressed, gave himself over to prayer, he brought back this rebuke from the Lord: “Why are you disturbed, little man? Did I not place you over my order as its shepherd, and now you do not know that I am its chief protector? . . . Do not be disturbed, therefore, but work out your salvation, for though the order were reduced to the number of three, it will by my grace remain unshaken.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

The French Franciscan scholar Father Éloi Leclerc, who better than anyone has presented this tormented phase of Francis’s life, says that the saint was so revived by the words of Christ that he went around repeating to himself the exclamation, “Dieu est, et cela suffit” (“God is and that suffices! God is and that suffices!”).[[14]](#footnote-14)

Let us also learn to repeat these simple words to ourselves when, in the Church or in our lives, we find ourselves in circumstances similar to those of Francis, and many clouds will disperse.

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English Translation by Marsha Daigle-Williamson

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Second Advent Sermon 2018

THE LIVING GOD AND THE LIVING TRINITY

When it comes to the knowledge of living God, an experience is more valuable than many arguments, so I would like to begin this second meditation precisely with an experience. Once I received a letter from a person I was accompanying in her spiritual journey, a married woman who died some years ago. The authenticity of her experiences is confirmed by the fact that she carried them to her grave without ever speaking about them to anybody except her spiritual father. But all graces belong to the Church, and for that reason I want to share them with you now that she is with the Lord. Her story made me think of Moses’ experience before the burning bush. She said,

I was not quite four years old and I was at my grandmother’s countryside home. One morning while I was waiting in my room for someone to come dress me, I was looking at a large linden tree whose branches were spread out in front of the window. The rising sun was shining on the front of it. I was enthralled by its beauty when suddenly my attention was drawn by an unusual brilliance, an extraordinary whiteness. Every leaf, every branch, began to vibrate like flickering flames of a thousand candles. I was more amazed than when I saw the first snowfall of my life. And my amazement increased when—I don’t know if it was with my physical eyes or not—at the center of that glistening I saw something like a gaze and a smile of inexpressible beauty and benevolence. My heart was beating wildly; I felt the power of that love penetrate me, and I had the sensation of being loved in the most intimate part of my being. It lasted a minute, a minute and a half—I don’t know—but for me it seemed like an eternity. I was brought back to reality by a cold shiver that went through my body, and with great sadness I realized that the gaze and the smile had disappeared and that little by little the splendor of the tree was fading. The leaves returned to their ordinary appearance, and to my great disappointment the linden tree, despite being bathed in the radiant light of a summer sun, seemed, when compared to its previous splendor, dark to me as if it were under a rainy sky.

I did not speak to anyone of this event, but a short time later I heard the cook and another lady talking to each other about God. I was startled and asked, “God? Who is he?” intuiting that he was something mysterious. “Poor child,” said the cook to the other woman, “her grandmother is a pagan and is not teaching her these things!” Turning to me, she said, “God is the one who created heaven and earth, human beings, and animals. He is all-powerful and dwells in heaven.” I remained silent, but I said to myself, “He is the one I saw!”

Nevertheless I was very confused. In my eyes my grandmother was far superior to these housekeepers, and yet the cook had said she was a pagan because she did not know God, and I had sensed it was a derogatory term. Who was right?

One morning I was again waiting to be dressed. I was impatient and deplored the fact that my baby clothes buttoned in the back. I blamed all this on “the malice of grown-ups against children who were in their power.” Finally I could no longer wait and said, “God, if you exist and are truly all-powerful, button my clothes in back so that I can do down to the garden.” I had not finished saying those words when I found my clothes were buttoned. I stood there with my mouth open, terrified by the effect of my words. My legs were shaking, so I sat down in front of the closet mirror to see if it were really true and to catch my breath. I did not yet know what the phrase “to tempt God” meant, but I understood that I would be reduced to dust if I opposed his will.

A life of holiness lived after that shows that it was a real experience of God and not the imagination of a little girl.

**God Is Love and Is Therefore Trinity**

Let us continue our reflection on the Living God. Whom do we Christians address when we say the word “God” without any other specification? Who does the “you” refer to when, in the words of the psalm, we say, “O God, you are my God” (Ps 63:1)? Who responds to that at the other end of the line, so to speak? That “you” is not simply God the Father, the first divine person, as though he exists or can be thought of for one single instant without the other two. Neither is it an indeterminate divine essence, as though there exists a divine essence that is specified only later as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The only God, the one who says in the Bible “I AM!” is the Father who generates the Son and who, with him, breathes the Spirit, communicating to both of them the whole of his divinity. It is the God who is a communion of love in whom *unity* and *trinity* come from the same source and from the same act, forming a *Tri-unity* in which neither of those two aspects—unity and plurality—precedes the other or exists without the other; neither of these two aspects is superior to the other or more “profound” than the other.

The “you” that we address in prayer, according to the circumstances and the grace of each of us, can be one of the three divine persons in particular—the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit—without the loss of the others. In fact, in each divine person in the trinitarian communion the other two are present. The Trinity is like one of those musical triangles that vibrates and gives forth the same sound from whatever side it is struck.

The living God of Christians, in conclusion, is none other than the living Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is contained, *in nuce*, in a nutshell, in the revelation of God as love. To say, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), is to say God is trinity. Every love implies a lover, a beloved, and a love that unites them. Every love is a love for someone or something; there is no such thing as love “in a vacuum” that has no object. Who does God love so as to be defined as love? Humanity? But then that would be love that existed only for some millions of years. Does he love the universe? But then that would be love that existed for some billions of years. So who did God first love so that he could be defined as love?

Greek thinkers and in general religious philosophers of all times, conceiving of God above all as “thought,” could have responded, God thought of himself; he was “pure thought, “the thought of thought” or “self-contemplative thought.” But this is no longer possible as soon as we say that God is first and foremost love, because the “pure love of self” would be sheer egotism; it would not be the highest exaltation of love but its total negation. So here is the answer from revelation as explained by the Church. God has always been love, *ab aeterno*, because even before there existed an object outside of himself to love he had within himself the Word, the Son whom he loved with an infinite love, that is, “in the Holy Spirit.”

This does not explain “how” unity can simultaneously be trinity; that is an unknowable mystery for us because it only occurs in God. It can, however, help us to grasp “why” the unity in God must also be plurality: because “God is love!” A God who was pure knowledge or pure law or pure power would certainly have no need to be triune. This would actually complicate matters, and in fact there has been no “triumvirate” that ever lasted for long in history! This is not how it is with a God who is first and foremost love because “if there are less than two, there can be no love.” Henri de Lubac wrote, “It is necessary for the world to know it. The revelation of [God as] Love overturns all that the world had conceived of the Divinity.”[[15]](#footnote-15) We Christians believe in “in one God,” not in a solitary God!

**Contemplating the Trinity “to Overcome the Hateful Divisions of This World”**[[16]](#footnote-16)

No treatise on the Trinity is as capable of having us enter into living contact with it than the contemplation of Andrei Rublev’s icon of the Trinity, which is reproduced in the mosaics we see before us at the top of the wall in front (in the Mater Redemptoris Chapel). Painted in 1425 for the Church of St. Sergius, this icon was declared in 1551 by the “Council of 100 Chapters” (the Stoglav Synod of Russian Bishops) to be the model for all representations of the Trinity.

One thing should be said immediately about this icon. It does not purport to represent the Trinity directly, which is, by definition, invisible and ineffable. That would be contrary to all the canons of Byzantine ecclesiastical iconography. What the icon actually depicts is the three angels who appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre (see Gen 18:1-15). This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that in other depictions of the same subject before and after Rublev, Abraham, Sarah, the calf, and an oak tree in the background also appear with the three figures. This scene, in light of the patristic tradition, is therefore read as a prefigurement of the Trinity. The icon is one of the forms that takes on a spiritual reading of the Bible, that is, it interprets an event in the Old Testament in light of the New Testament.

The dogma of the unity and trinity of God is expressed in Rublev’s icon by the fact that the three Persons represented are distinct but closely resemble each other. They are ideally positioned within a circle that highlights their unity, while their diverse motions, especially of the chief angel, speak of their differences. In the original, all three are wearing blue garments as a sign of the divine nature they have in common. But on top of or underneath the blue garments, each one is clothed in a color that distinguishes them. The Father (generally identified as the angel to the left toward whom the other two incline their heads) has a garment of indefinable color, almost of pure light, as a sign of his invisibility and inaccessibility. The Son, in the center, is wearing a dark tunic as a sign of the humanity with which he has clothed himself. The Holy Spirit, the angel to the right, wears a green mantle as a sign of life, since he is “the giver of life.”

One thing is especially striking as we contemplate Rublev’s icon: the profound peace and unity that emanate from the whole. A silent cry comes forth from the icon: “Be one as we are one.” St. Sergius of Radonezh, the saint for whose monastery the icon was painted, is known in Russian history for having brought unity among warring chieftains and for having thus made possible the liberation of Russia from the Tartars. His motto was “Through the contemplation of the most Holy Trinity we can overcome the hateful divisions of this world.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Rublev wanted to reflect the spiritual inheritance of this great saint who had made the Trinity the source of inspiration for his life and work.

From this vision of the Trinity we see above all a call to unity. Everyone wants unity. After the word “happiness” there is no other word that speaks as much to the compelling need of the human heart as the word “unity.” We are “finite beings, capable of infinity,” and this means we are limited creatures who aspire to go beyond our limitations, to be “in some way everything,” *quodammodo omnia*, as they say in philosophy. We do not resign ourselves to being only what we are. Who does not remember in youth a moment of poignant need for unity, when you wished that the whole universe could be enclosed in a single spot and to be with others in that very spot, because the sense of separation and loneliness in the world was felt with such suffering? St. Thomas Aquinas explains it all this way: “*One* [*unum*] is a principle, just as *good* [*bonum*] is. Hence everything naturally desires unity, just as it desires goodness: and therefore, just as love or desire for good is a cause of sorrow, so also is the love or craving for unity.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

All human beings want unity and desire it from the bottom of their hearts. Then why is it so difficult to achieve if everyone desires it so much? It is because we want unity of course, but . . . unity around *our* point of view. Our view seems so obvious, so reasonable, that we are astounded that others do not agree and insist instead on *their* point of view. We even carefully lay out the path for others to come and join us where we are. The problem is that the person before me is doing exactly the same thing with me. No unity will ever be achieved if we go about it this way; unity requires the opposite path.

The Trinity shows us the true path to unity. The Eastern Fathers, proceeding from the divine *Persons* rather than from the concept of *nature*, found themselves needing to affirm divine unity in another way. They did that by developing the doctrine of *perichoresis*. Applied to the Trinity, *perichoresis* (literally, “mutual interpenetration”) expresses the unity of the three Persons in their one essence.[[19]](#footnote-19) Through it the three Persons are united but without being confused; each Person “identifies” with the other, gives himself to the other, and sustains the existence of the other. The concept is based on Christ’s words: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me” (Jn 14:11).

Jesus has extended this principle to his relationship with us: “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (Jn 14:20); “I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one” (Jn 17:23). The path to true unity is to imitate the divine *perichoresis* among ourselves in the Church. St. Paul indicates its basis when he says that we are “individually members one of another” (Rom 12:5). The *perichoresis* in God is based on the unity of nature, and in us on the fact that we are “one body and one Spirit” (see 1 Cor 12:12-13).

The apostle helps us understand what it means for us in practice to live out the *perichoresis*, or mutual interdependence. “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Cor 12:26); “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). The “burdens” of others include sicknesses, limitations, worries, and even defects and sins. To live out the *perichoresis* means “to identify” ourselves with others, to walk in their shoes, as we say, to seek to understand before judging.

The three divine Persons are always engaged in glorifying each other. The Father glorifies the Son; the Son glorifies the Father (see Jn 17:4-5); the Paraclete will glorify the Son (see Jn 16:14). Each one devotes himself to making the others known. The Son teaches us to cry, “Abba!”; the Holy Spirit teaches us to cry, “Jesus is Lord!” and “Come, Lord,” *Maranatha*. Each of them teaches us to speak not his own name but the name of the other two Persons. There is only one “place” in the world where the rule of “love your neighbor as yourself” is perfectly put into practice, and it is in the Trinity! Every divine Person loves the others exactly as himself.

How different the atmosphere is when we try to live out these sublime ideals in any social setting! I am thinking of a family in which the husband defends and praises the wife before the children and strangers and in which the wife does the same for the husband. I am thinking of a community whose members try to put into practice the exhortation of St. James, “Do not speak evil against one another, brethren” (4:11), or the exhortation of St. Paul, “Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:10). Taking this approach, a person could even rejoice at someone’s nomination for a certain post of honor (for example, in being named a cardinal) as if he himself had been nominated.

But let us have the saints tell us these things; they alone have the right to do so since they put it into practice. In one of his admonitions St. Francis of Assisi says, “Blessed the religious who takes no more pride in the good that God says and does through him, than in that which he says and does through someone else.”[[20]](#footnote-20) St. Augustine said to the people,

If you love unity, whoever in it has anything has it also for you. Take away envy, and what I have is yours; let me take away envy, and what you have is mine. Jealousy separates, right reason joins. . . . In the body, only the hand works; but does it work only for itself? It also worked for the eye; for if some blow were coming and not going against the hand but only against the face, does the hand say, “I do not move myself because it is not aiming at me”?[[21]](#footnote-21)

This means that if you try to put the good of the community above your own personal affirmation, then every charism and every honor present in the community will be yours, just as in a united family the success of one member makes all the others happy. This is why love is “a more excellent way” (1 Cor 12:31). It multiplies charisms and makes the charisms of one person the charisms of all. I am aware that these things are easy to say but hard to put into practice; it is nonetheless good to know that, with the grace of God, they are possible and that some souls have succeeded in practicing them and do so for us in the Church as well.

Contemplating the Trinity truly helps us to overcome “the hateful divisions of the world.” The first miracle the Spirit performed at Pentecost was to make the disciples of “one accord” (Acts 1:14), “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). He is always ready to repeat this miracle, to transform *dis-cord* into *con-cord* every time. We can be divided on our thinking—on doctrinal or pastoral questions that are still legitimately debated in the Church—but we should never be divided in heart: *In dubiis* *libertas, in omnibus vero caritas* (“liberty in doubtful things, charity in all things”). This specifically means imitating the unity in the Trinity, which is, in fact, “unity in diversity.”

**Entering into the Trinity**

There is something that is more blessed that we can do with regard to the Trinity than contemplate and imitate it, and that is to enter into it! We cannot wrap our arms around the ocean, but we can enter into it; we cannot encompass the mystery of the Trinity with our minds, but we can enter into it! Christ has left us a concrete way to do that: the Eucharist. In Rublev’s icon, the three angels are positioned around a table; there is a cup on the table and, inside the cup, we see a lamb. There is no simpler or more effective way to tell us that the Trinity meets us every day in the Eucharist. The banquet of Abraham at the oaks of Mamre is a figure of that banquet. The visitation to Abraham by the Three is renewed for us each time we receive Communion.

The doctrine of the Trinitarian *perichoresis* is enlightening in regard to the Eucharist as well. It tells us that wherever one person of the Trinity is, the other two are also present, inseparably united. The moment of Communion actualizes the words of Christ in a strict sense: “I in them and you in me” (Jn 17:23); “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). He who receives me receives the Father. We can never fully appreciate the grace that is offered to us in the Eucharist. Table guests of the Trinity!

St. Cyril of Alexandria, with his usual theological clarity, has formulated this truth that inextricably links the Trinity to the Eucharist. He says, “We have . . . been made perfect in unity with God the Father, through the mediation of Christ. **For by receiving in ourselves, both in a corporeal and spiritual sense, . . . Him that is the Son by Nature, . . . we have been glorified and become partakers in the Nature of the Most High.”**[[22]](#footnote-22)

The same person whose testimony I quoted at the beginning confided to me an experience of the Trinity she had later in life. I want to share this too because it makes us understand that the Church is not just what people see or say about it. She said,

The other night the Spirit introduced me to the mystery of trinitarian love. The ecstatic exchange of giving and receiving was taking place within me: from Christ, to whom I was united, toward the Father and the Father toward the Son. How can I express the inexpressible? I was not seeing anything, but what I experienced was far more than seeing, and my words were wholly inadequate to describe this reciprocal exchange of joy that was going forth, receiving and giving. And an intense life flowed from One to Another in that exchange, like warm milk that flows from a mother’s breast to the baby’s mouth attached to that comfort. And I was that baby, and all of creation was participating in the life, the reign, and the glory that was being regenerated by Christ. O holy and living Trinity! I felt as though I were outside of myself for two or three days, and still today this experience remains strongly impressed upon me.

The Trinity is not only a mystery and an article of our faith, but also a living and vibrant reality. As I said at the beginning, the living God of the Bible whom we are seeking is none other than the living Trinity. May the Spirit lead us into it as well and make us taste their sweet companionship.

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English Translation by Marsha Daigle-Williamson

Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFMCap

“NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN GOD . . . .”

Third Advent Sermon 2018

The living God is the living Trinity, we said last time. But we dwell in time and God dwells in eternity. How can we overcome this “infinite qualitative difference”? How can we build a bridge over such an infinite gulf? The answer is in the feast that we are preparing to celebrate: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

The great Byzantine theologian Nicholas Cabasilas has written that there were three walls that stood between us and God: the wall of nature, since God is spirit and we are flesh; the wall of sin; and the wall of death. The first of these walls was torn down through the Incarnation when divine nature and human nature became united in the person of Christ. The wall of sin was torn down on the cross, and the wall of death was torn down through the resurrection.[[23]](#footnote-23) Jesus Christ is now the definitive place of the encounter between the living God and a living human being. In him the far-off God has drawn near to us, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

The path to the pursuit of the living God that we have undertaken this Advent has an illustrious precedent: St. Bonaventure’s *The Mind’s Road to God* (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*). As a speculative philosopher and theologian, he identified seven steps by which the soul ascends to the knowledge of God:

The contemplation of God in his traces in the universe

The contemplation of God in his traces in the visible world

The contemplation of God through his image impressed on the powers of the soul

The contemplation of God in the soul renewed by grace

The contemplation of the divine unity under its basic name: Being

The contemplation of God in the most Blessed Trinity under its name: Goodness

The mental and mystical ecstasy in which rest is given to the mind and completely transports the affections to God.[[24]](#footnote-24)

After having reviewed the various ways that we have to increase our knowledge of the living God and the “places” in which we may encounter him, St. Bonaventure reaches the conclusion that the definitive, infallible, and most satisfactory way is the person of Jesus Christ. This is in fact how he ends his treatise:

It now remains for the mind, speculating on these things, to go beyond the world of senses, and indeed, to go beyond itself. In this part of the journey Christ is the Way and the Gate; Christ is the Ladder and the vehicle, the propitiatory, as it were, placed over the Ark of God and the mystery which was hidden from eternity. [[25]](#footnote-25)

The philosopher Blaise Pascal, in his famous “Memorial,” reaches the same conclusion: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob “can be found only in the ways taught in the Gospel.”[[26]](#footnote-26) The reason for this is simple: Jesus Christ is “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). The Letter to the Hebrews bases the innovation of the New Testament on this:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Heb 1:1-2)

The living God no longer speaks to us through an intermediary but in person because the Son “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature” (Heb 1:3). This is the case from the ontological and objective perspective; on the other hand, from the existential or subjective perspective, the great innovation is that now it is no longer human beings who are in search of the living God “in the hope that they might feel after him and find him” (Acts 17:27). It is the living God who has descended to seek human beings so that he could dwell in their hearts. From now on, Christ is the place in which one can encounter and worship “in spirit and truth.” “If a man loves me,” Jesus says, “he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23).

**“No one comes to the Father except through me”**

The one who has established this truth—that Jesus Christ is the supreme revealer of the living God and the “place” in which we can enter into contact with him—is John the evangelist. We rely on him because he helps our pursuit of the living God be something more than a simple “pursuit” but also an “experience” of him, so that we have not only knowledge of him but an intense “feeling” of him.

So as not to lose the power and the immediacy of his inspired testimony, let us avoid imposing some kind of interpretive framework on the texts. Let us move on simply to review the most explicit words in which Jesus presents himself as the definitive revealer of God. Each of these sayings is able in itself to bring us to the edge of the mystery and make us look out over an infinite horizon.

John 1:18: “*No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known*.” To understand the meaning of these words we need to refer to the whole biblical tradition that no man is able to see God and live. We only have to read Exodus 33:18-20: “Moses said, ‘I beg, show me your glory.’ And he [God] said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name “The Lord”; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.’” And then God adds, “You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live.”

There is such a great gulf between the holiness of God and the unworthiness of a human being that a person would die in seeing God or even just in hearing him. For this reason, Moses (see Ex 34:33) and the Seraphim as well (see Is 6:2) veil their faces before God. Remaining alive after having seen God, a person experiences grateful amazement (see Gen 32:30). It is a rare favor that God grants to Moses (see Ex 33:11) and to Elijah (see 1 Kgs 19:11ff), the same two people allowed on Mount Tabor to contemplate the glory of Christ.

John 10:30: “*I and the Father are one*.” This is the affirmation that is perhaps the most charged with mystery in all of the New Testament. Jesus Christ is not only the revealer of the living God, he is also himself the living God! The revealer and the revealed are the same person. The Church’s reflection will start from this affirmation to arrive at the full and explicit faith in the Trinity. What we translate by the word “one” here is a neuter noun (*hen*) in Greek and *unum* in Latin). If Jesus had used the masculine *eis,* *unus*, one might have thought that the Father and the Son were one single person, and then the doctrine of the Trinity would have been excluded at the outset. When Jesus said “unum,” “one thing,” the Fathers rightly deduced that the Father and the Son (and later the Holy Spirit) have one same nature but are not one single person.

John 14:6: “*Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me*.’” We need to pause here for a bit longer. “No one comes to the Father, but by me.” Read in the current context of interfaith dialogue, these words raise a question that we cannot pass over in silence. What are we to think of that whole part of humanity that does not know Christ and his gospel? Do none of them come to the Father? Are they excluded from the mediation of Christ and thus from his salvation?

One thing is certain and every Christian theology of religions needs to start from this point: Christ has given his life “as a ransom” and for love of all human beings because they are all creatures of his Father and his brothers. He did not make any distinctions. His *offer* of salvation, at least, is certainly universal. “I, when I am lifted up from the earth [on the cross!], will draw all men to myself” (Jn 12:32). Peter proclaims before the Sanhedrin, “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Some people, while professing to be Christian believers, cannot accept that a particular historical event, like the death and resurrection of Christ, could have changed the situation for the entire human race before God, and therefore they substitute the historical event with an “impersonal” universal principle, the idea of “Good” instead of “God. They should, I believe, ask another question, that is, whether or not they truly believe in the mystery by which the whole of Christianity stands or falls: the Incarnation of the Word and the divinity of Christ. Once this truth is admitted, it no longer seems unreasonable that a particular act could have a universal significance. Rather it would be strange to think otherwise.

The greatest injustice, in removing such a large part of humanity from this act, is not against Christ or the Church but against humanity itself. Is it possible to begin with the affirmation that “Christ is the supreme, definitive, and normative offer of salvation by God to the world” without recognizing the right for all human beings to benefit from this salvation?

But we can ask, “Is it realistic to continue believing in the mysterious presence and influence of Christ in religions that existed before his coming in which people do not experience any need after twenty centuries to accept his gospel?” There is an aspect of God the Bible reveals that can help us answer this objection: the humility of God, the hiddenness of God. “Truly, you are a God who hide yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior” (Is 45:15) (“*Vere tu es Deus absconditus*,” Vulgate). God is humble in creating. He does not put his label on everything, the way people do. It is not written within creatures that they are made by God; that is left for them to discover.

How much time did it take for human beings to recognize to whom they owed their existence and who had created the heavens and the earth for them? How much time will it still take before everyone ends up recognizing that? Does God cease being the creator of everything because of this? Does he cease causing the sun to shine on those who know him and those who do not? The same thing is true with redemption. God is humble in creating and humble in saving people. Christ is more concerned that all human beings be saved than that they know who their Savior is, although we must do our best to help them in discovering it.

More than the salvation of those who have not known Christ, we need to be concerned, I believe, about the salvation of those who have known him but live as though he never existed, completely forgetting their baptism and estranged from the Church and every religious practice. As for the salvation of non-believing people, Scripture assures us that “God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35). Francis of Assisi, in turn, makes a statement that is almost incredible for his time: “Whatever is good there [in pagan writings] does not pertain to the pagans, nor to any other men, but to God alone, to whom belongs every good.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

**The Paraclete Will Guide into All the Truth**

Speaking of the role of Christ toward people living outside the Church, Vatican II affirms that “The Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with his paschal mystery” (*Gaudium et spes*, 22), that is, with his redemptive work. We have arrived at the last step in our journey, the Holy Spirit. At the end of his earthly life Jesus said,

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (Jn 16:12-15)

Jesus is still the one who continues to reveal the Father in the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is now the Spirit of the Risen One, the Spirit who continues and carries out the work of the earthly Jesus. Very soon after the words recorded above, Jesus adds, “*I have said this to you in figures; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but tell you plainly of the Father*” (Jn 16:25). When is it that Jesus will be able to speak plainly to his disciples about the Father if these are among his last words when he was alive and would die soon after on the cross? He will do it precisely through the Holy Spirit that he will send from the Father.

St. Gregory of Nyssa has written that if we remove the Holy Spirit from the Godhead, what remains is no longer the living God but a lifeless god.[[28]](#footnote-28) Jesus himself explains the reason for this: “It is the spirit,” he says, “that gives life, the flesh is of no avail” (Jn 6:63). Applied to us, this means it is the Spirit who gives life to the idea of God and to our pursuit of him. Human reason, marked as it is by sin, is not enough by itself. The person who is going to speak about God, in any capacity, needs to remember, if he or she is a believer, that “No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:11).

The Holy Spirit is the true “living environment,” the *Sitz in Leben*, in which every authentic Christian theology is born and developed. The Holy Spirit is that invisible space in which it is possible to perceive the movement of God and in which God himself appears as a living and active reality. The living God, unlike idols, is a “God who breathes,” and the Holy Spirit is his breath. This is true also with regard to Christ. “In the Holy Spirit” indicates that mysterious sphere in which, since Christ’s resurrection, one can enter into contact with him and experience his sanctifying action. Christ now lives “in the Spirit” (see Rom 1:4; 1 Pet 3:18). The Holy Spirit is “the breath of the Risen One” in history.

The high voltage arc between God and human beings cannot therefore be completed and the sudden flash cannot be produced except in this special “magnetic field” constituted by the Holy Spirit of the living God. He is the one who creates in the depths of a person that state of grace through which one experiences a great “illumination” one day and discovers that God exists, that he is real, to the point of having “one’s breath taken away.”

We need to repeat to any person who looks for God elsewhere—just in the pages of books or through human reasoning—what the angel told the women: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (Lk 24:5). A “close relationship with God”, St. Basil says, depends on the Holy Spirit.[[29]](#footnote-29) It depends on whether God is close to us or a stranger to us, whether we are sensitive or allergic to his reality.

The solution is therefore to find a contact that is increasingly filled with the reality, with the person of the Holy Spirit. Let us not be content with a renewed pneumatology, with a *theology* of the spirit, but let us also aspire to have a personal *experience* of him. Millions of Christians in our time have had this personal experience that is called “Baptism of the Spirit.” Here is how one of the first people in the Catholic Church who had that experience described its effects to a friend:

Our faith has come alive, our believing has become a kind of knowing. Suddenly, the world of the supernatural has become more real than the natural. In brief, Jesus Christ is a real person to us, a real person who is Our Lord and who is active in our lives. We read the New Testament as though it were literally true now, every word, every line. Prayer and the sacraments have become truly our daily bread instead of practices which we recognize as “good for us.” A love of Scripture, a love of the Church I never thought possible, a transformation of our relationships with others, a need and a power of witness beyond all expectation, have all become part of our lives. The initial experience of the “Baptism of the Spirit” was not at all emotional, but life has become suffused with calm, confidence, joy, and peace.[[30]](#footnote-30)

**“And the Word became flesh”**

A meditation on the role of Christ as the unique revealer of the Living God cannot conclude in a worthier manner than with the Prologue of John’s Gospel—not as a Gospel passage to comment on (which we will do on Christmas day) but as a hymn of praise that now springs up in our hearts to the glory of the most holy Trinity. That such a representative part of the Church in a place like this proclaims its absolute faith in Christ the Son of God and the light of the world has a salvific value. Christ founded his church on such an act of faith and has promised that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Let us stand and recite it with hearts full of amazement and gratitude.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. […]The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.[…] No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. (Jn 1:1-18, NIV)

Holy Father, Venerable Fathers, brothers and sisters, Merry Christmas!

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English translation by Marsha Daigle-Williamson

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2. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 10, 27, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 254. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hand-written prayer-poem [“Nada Te Turbe”] known as St. Teresa of Avila’s bookmark found in her breviary after her death. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “*Zu den Sachen selbst*” is the motto of Edmund Husserl’s School of Phenomenology. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa teologicae*, II-IIae, q. 1, a. 2,2. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (1938; repr. New York: New Directions, 2007), pp. 126-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See André Frossard, *I Have Met Him: God Exists*, trans. Marjorie Villiers (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), p. 22, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., pp. 118-119. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., p. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. St. Augustine, Commentary on Psalm 85, 12 (CCL 39, p. 1l36); see also *Confessions*, 10, 6, 9, p. 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, XI, 5, 2 (PG 44, 1001). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Thomas Celano, *Second Life of Francis*, CXVII, 158, in *Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1991), pp. 489-490. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Éloi Leclerc, *The Wisdom of the Poor One of Assisi*, trans. Marie-Louise Johnson (Pasadena, CA: Hope Publishing, 1996), p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The following reproduces in part what I wrote in *Contemplating the Trinity*: *The Path to the Abundant Christian Life* (Ijamsville, MD: Word Among Us Press, 2007), p. 11ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Nicholas Zernov, *The Russians and Their Church*, 3rd ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-IIae, q. 26, a. 3, vol. 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), p. 749. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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21. St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 32, 8, trans. John W. Rettig, vol. 88, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 1993), p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel According to S. John, XI, 12, vol. 3, trans. Thomas Randell (London: Walter Smith, 1885), p. 555 (PG 74, p. 564). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, Book 3, 3, trans. Carmino J. deCatanzaro (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1974), pp. 105-106. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This phrasing is based on the chapter titles in Bonaventure’s *The Mind’s Journey to God*, trans. Lawrence S. Cunningham (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press,1979), [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 7,1, p. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
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28. See St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De eo qui sit ad imaginem Dei* (PG 44, p. 1340). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 19, 49 (PG 32, 157). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Testimony quoted in Patti Gallagher Mansfield, *As by a New Pentecost: The Dramatic Beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (Amor Deus Publishing, Phoenix, AZ, 2016, p.55). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)