

Readings:

Wisdom 3:1-9  
Psalm 83  
Acts 10:34-36, 42-43  
Matthew 5:1-12

Before touching on this evening's readings I want to tell you two half-true stories about Sister Aquinas. Even though they are only half-true, they do point to what was so fine and good about her. I believe that the stories will somehow tie in with this liturgy.

The day that both Mary Nimitz and I entered the convent, we and her parents, Fleet Admiral and Mrs. Chester Nimitz, found ourselves in the novitiate parlor prior to going upstairs to put on our postulant outfits. In the parlor we had some time to converse with our novice mistress, Sister Ignatius. At one point in the conversation Mrs. Nimitz said to Sister Ignatius, "If Mary ever becomes fractious, serve her some tapioca pudding." When I looked up that word some years later I found that it meant rebellious or cranky. The untruth of the story is that I never found Sister Aquinas to be rebellious or cranky. The true part of the story is that one of Sister's favorite desserts was always tapioca pudding.

The other half-true story is this: as young sisters we had adjoining "cells" in a small Motherhouse dormitory. Thick curtains separated us, but any noise could still be heard. Every night Sister Aquinas read Scripture before turning out her light. One night I heard her chuckling. "What?" I whispered. "Listen to this," she said. "It's out of the Book of Proverbs—'Go to the ant, o sluggard, and learn wisdom.' Isn't that wonderful?" How untrue that Sister Aquinas was a sluggard: industry was a hallmark of her life and her gift to everyone. With her deep love of nature, though, perhaps it was the ant that taught her wisdom. I would, however, offer that it was really God who had been her teacher.

And now, to this evening's Scriptures, all of them chosen carefully, with Sister Aquinas in mind. From them two passages in particular might seem to be especially full of meaning in terms of this occasion.

The first reading, from the Book of Wisdom, tells that the souls of the righteous, the virtuous, are in the hands of God, and they are at peace. Saint Thomas Aquinas, Sister Aquinas' patron saint, wrote in the Summa that even though we might mourn the loss of loved ones, those now with God are so happy and at peace that sorrow because of our grieving finds no place in them. Those who trust in God will abide forever with God in joy. How can we not be comforted by knowing that Sister has given herself into God's hands!

Matthew's gospel reading holds a similar theme: blessed are those who are good; who work and suffer on behalf of the good; they will receive God's blessing, they will be happy. All of Jesus' beatitudes are important, but for this evening one blessing seems to be especially relevant. It is this: blessed are those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God. To be pure in heart is, to put it plainly, to be good. Purity of heart bears out that goodness by faith and hope and love; it expresses to the world at large one's transparent simplicity, as it were – one's uncomplicated consistency in loving God and in serving others; that there is no discrepancy between what a person says and what a person does. It is God, of course, who makes the heart pure. From there we can understand how that pure heart can be filled with desire to live a life of prayer and generous service. When the heart is truly pure, holiness, blessedness come quickly following.

Sister Aquinas, I believe, was pure in heart. Of particular consistency in all she did was shown through her love for her earthly home and her delight in observing God's role in all creation. She was an advocate for protecting the earth and all its creatures, great and small (perhaps the ant figures here). For all her presence in our congregation and in the broader world, she was consistently, transparently straightforward, even tempered, incredibly, always pleasant and happy – never fractious.

Each one of us has different stories about Sister Aquinas, each one can tell genuinely true stories about her character, her intelligence, her many gifts, her rich prayer life, her diligence in serving others. The scriptural passages we have heard, when heard in light of what we are about this evening, give us hope that to be good, as Sister Aquinas surely was, is to be blessed by God, as Sister Aquinas surely was. So. Let us now continue this Eucharistic celebration, praying that God will bless us too with gifts of virtue and pure hearts. We are about to celebrate the central moments of this Mass; let us be grateful for the gift

of Jesus' body and blood as we continue our life journeys. At the same time, may we be comforted by thought of the journey that Sister Aquinas has so well completed.

Sister Marie Sagués, O.P.  
March 3, 2006