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The Revelation of Jesus Christ in Scripture

OUR DESIRE FOR GOD

The Gospel reading for the Second Sunday of Easter each year is always taken from the Gospel of John. It tells the story of the Risen Jesus appearing to the disciples behind locked doors. Jesus greeted his friends with “Peace be with you” and showed them his hands and side. He breathed on them and gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit. He told them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn 20:22–23).

What you probably remember most about hearing the Gospel at Mass that day is that one of the Apostles happened to be absent when Jesus appeared. Do you remember his name? Yes, the Gospel goes on to say that “Thomas, called Didymus . . . was not with them when Jesus came” (Jn 20:24).



“My Lord and My God!”

You can probably recall the rest of the reading, too. Thomas told the others, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

The next week Jesus came to the Apostles again. This time Thomas was there. Jesus let Thomas do as he wished—put his finger in the wounds of Jesus’ hands and his hand in the wounds of Jesus’ side. Jesus told Thomas to “not be unbelieving, but believe.”

Thomas answered and said to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” Once an unbeliever, Thomas was the first person recorded in the Gospels to identify Jesus as God. Presumably the peace Jesus had offered the others was received by Thomas, for he had found God face to face.

Human beings are created with a desire or longing for God that can’t be satisfied until we come to know, **praise**, and love him. God likewise has a desire to draw each person to himself. Imagine the seven days between Jesus’ appearances to the disciples without Thomas present to the day when Jesus and Thomas met face to face. Thomas did not abandon the group of believers in the meantime. He stayed with the hope he would experience what they had experienced. And Jesus returned specifically to reach out to Thomas.

Christ is the eternal Word that became flesh. The Son of God assumed a human nature in order for us to be saved. Thomas, like the others disciples, was given an opportunity unique to human history: to meet and know God *incarnate*, in

the flesh. Putting his finger and hand into Jesus' wounds, Thomas was reminded that Jesus was a human

being with real flesh and blood. The testimony of the other disciples about Jesus' **Resurrection**—and now this special Resurrection appearance—convinced Thomas that Jesus was also God. The belief in the **Incarnation**—that God assumed human nature—is a distinctive sign of Christian faith.

Today, our search for God might be easier if we could speak to Jesus face to face. The Gospel for the Second Sunday of Easter acknowledges this. Jesus said to Thomas, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” But Jesus has “blessed” our search for him and offered us many ways to know him. These ways to know Jesus—revealed in the **Church**—are the subject of this book.

The natural human search for God requires that we make every effort with our mind and heart while knowing that even if we forget God or reject him, he will never stop calling us to himself. In this search, we can find lasting happiness and the meaning of life. St. Augustine wrote about this search for God and what it brings:

Despite everything, man, though but a small part of your creation, wants to praise you. You yourself encourage him to delight in your praise, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.¹

Church

The Body of Christ; that is, the community of God's People who profess faith in the Risen Lord Jesus and love and serve others under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Pope and his bishops guide the Roman Catholic Church.

REVIEW

1. According to the Gospels, what did Thomas do before anyone else?
2. Why did Jesus assume a human nature?
3. Define *Incarnation*.

WRITE OR DISCUSS

- How has your journey to know Jesus been blessed?

WHO IS GOD?

“I believe in God” is the first statement of the **Catholic** creeds. This profession of faith begins with God because God is the beginning and the end of everything. Most people—whether or not they practice a **religion**—do believe in or acknowledge a supreme being. A belief in God further affects their lives, leading to an obedience or a worship of a power or a being larger than they are.

However, there are many different understandings of God. All the major religions believe in some invisible, higher reality, though it may be named differently in the other religions. For example, Hindus name this deity “Brahma.” Buddhism does not name a personal God but does acknowledge an Ultimate Reality of the universe. Muslims call God “Allah.” Judaism has such great respect for the name of God that the most important name given to God—represented by four Hebrew letters

Covenant

The open-ended contract of love between God and human beings. Jesus’ Death and Resurrection sealed God’s New Covenant of love for all time. Testament translates to covenant.

for **YHWH**—cannot be pronounced. Judaism also has many other names for God,

Adonai, or “My Lord,” being the first name used in Scripture. The Catholic creeds continue by naming our central beliefs about God:

- There is one God.
- God is Creator, not created.
- God is almighty.
- God is Trinitarian.

The belief in one God is different from what people once believed. This belief seems natural to us now, but it wasn’t always so. Prior to God’s self-revelation and his **covenant** with the Israelites from the Old Testament, **monotheism**—the belief in only one supreme God—was not developed. For example, Hinduism, though it proclaims one supreme God, also permits and worships lesser gods. Zoroastrianism believes in the triumph of a good god but also acknowledges an equally powerful evil force. This makes its beliefs essentially dualistic. Buddhism, in some forms, considers Siddhartha Gautama as the supreme god, but he is also considered essentially a man who achieved enlightenment.

Monotheism contradicts not only **atheism** (the belief in no God), but also **polytheism** (belief in many gods) and **pantheism** (belief that God and nature are the same). Of the major religions, only Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are monotheistic.

Apologetics:

CATHOLIC FAQs

Use this chapter and other sources to formulate your own answers to these questions. Then check your answers at “Catholic FAQs” at www.avemariapress.com:
Religious Education.

- ☞ How is God the author of the Sacred Scripture?
- ☞ Who wrote the Bible?
- ☞ Why should Christians bother reading the Old Testament?

One of the central beliefs about God that most religions have in common is that “God is good.” If this wasn’t so, theologians (those who study God) and faithful people in general would likely not spend time trying to figure out much more about God’s identity. If people believed God to be evil and vindictive, they would likely look for ways to appease this power or simply run for cover and hide!

We know from our personal experience, from the words of the Scriptures, and from other Divine Revelation passed on to us in the Church that God is indeed good. Not only that, but he loves each person even more than the person loves himself or herself. God’s love for Israel is compared to a father’s love for his son. His love for his people is stronger than a mother’s for her children. And in the course of history, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). Also, God is capable of receiving love in return and hopes we will offer our love to him freely.

The monotheistic religions believe in a God who is not only good, but also almighty—above all others. They see God as the Creator of all that exists. These major characteristics of God help fill in more of the details of God’s nature.

Attributes of God

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), one of the most important theologians in Church history, named nine attributes that tell us about God’s nature. They are as follows:

1. *God is eternal.* He has no beginning and no end. Or, to put it another way, God always was, always is, and always will be.
2. *God is unique.* God is the fullness of being and perfection. God is the designer of a one-and-only world. Even the people he creates are one of a kind.

3. *God is infinite and omnipotent.* There are no limits to God. **Omnipotence** is a word that refers to God's supreme power and authority over all of creation.
4. *God is omnipresent.* This reminds us of a lesson we learned early in life: God sees everything. God has no space limitations. He is everywhere. You can never be away from God.
5. *God contains all things.* All of creation is under God's care and jurisdiction.
6. *God is immutable.* God does not evolve. God does not change. God is the same God now as he always has been and always will be.
7. *God is pure spirit.* Though God has been described with human attributes (e.g., a wise old man with a long beard), God is not a material creation. God's image cannot be made. God is a pure spirit who cannot be divided into parts. God is simple but complex.
8. *God is alive.* We believe in a living God, a God who acts in the lives of people. Most concretely, he came to this world in the incarnate form of Jesus Christ.
9. *God is holy.* God is pure goodness. God is pure love.

Of all the attributes of God, only his omnipotence is named in the creeds. Our belief in an almighty God affects how we live our lives. We believe that God not only *rules* everything, but he can *do* everything and anything. When we read that an angel visited Mary and told her she would give birth to a son without conceiving it with a man, this is believable to us because of God's almighty power. The angel reinforced this by saying, "Nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37).

God's almighty power does not coerce us into obedience. In fact, his power is loving. God is a loving Father who takes care of our needs. He says, "I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me" (2 Cor 6:18). Jesus teaches that our heavenly Father "knows all that we need" (see Luke 12:30) and will grant us these things when we accept him first.

Finally, God's almighty power sustains even the "evidence" of weakness when we witness evil and suffering in our world. This is part of another of God's attributes—his **mystery**. Still, though we might not fully understand why there is evil, suffering, and death, we do witness how the Almighty God is even able to conquer these, too—through the Resurrection of his Son, Jesus, and through that the ultimate end of all sin and death.

God Is Creator

In our Catholic creeds, we confess that God the Father is "Creator of heaven and earth," of "all that is, seen and unseen." The first words of the Scriptures say that "In the beginning . . . God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1).

Through our examination of creation, we learn several other things about God.

First, we know that God created from nothing. God did not use any preexistent thing, nor did he need any help to create. As St. Theophilus of Antioch put it:

If God had drawn the world from pre-existent matter, what would be so extraordinary in that? A human artisan makes from a given material whatever he wants, while God shows his power by starting from nothing to make all he wants.

Second, God creates what he wants. Creation is not left to blind fate or chance. God made his creatures because he wanted to share his being, goodness, and wisdom. “Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary,” Pope Benedict XVI preached in his inaugural Mass as Pope in 2005.

Third, what God has made is good. As humans, because we are created in God’s goodness, we share in his goodness. All creation—including the physical world—is a product of God’s goodness.

Fourth, God is greater than his works of creation. God is outside of his creation, yet at the same time, he is present to it. As the Acts of the Apostles puts it, “In [God] we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Fifth, God supports his creation. For example, we are not created and then abandoned by God. Rather, God’s **providence** leads and guides us to our final end: **salvation** and union with God.

God’s act of creation was the first witness to his love and wisdom. In creation, we get the first glimpse of God’s saving plan of love, one that culminates in Jesus Christ. This plan of God’s is one in which we, his creations, take an active involvement. God intended for people to share not only in the saving work of the world, but also in creation itself. That is why humans are made as male and female. God created man and woman to be



salvation

The extension of God’s forgiveness, grace, and healing to the world through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

procreators, to share in the divine activity of bringing life in his image to the world.

Creation itself is the work of the **Holy Trinity**—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Traditionally, God the Father has been given the role of Creator. It was said that he made everything by himself—by the Son and the Spirit who are, according to St. Irenaeus, “his hands.”

Ultimately, the work of creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity.

Jesus Christ: God Incarnate

And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father’s only Son,
full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:14)

Belief in the true Incarnation—the taking on of human nature and human flesh by the Son of God—is the distinctive element of Christianity. What a challenging belief, that the God with attributes such as eternal, infinite, omnipotent, omnipresent, immutable, pure of spirit, and holy would empty himself to become a human being! God, in fact, entered human history by becoming one of his creatures while all the time remaining the Creator of the universe.

It would be wise to digest the previous paragraph (including the passage from the Gospel of John) before moving on. The purpose of this book in total is to help you understand and believe more deeply that Jesus is the Christ, the chosen Messiah who has come to earth to offer you the promise of Redemption and life in his eternal Kingdom. The purpose of each of these chapters is