

Daily Meditation 04/20/2022

In Lead-Up to Earth Day, Some Reflections

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we are looking forward to Friday, which is Earth Day around the world. And we are going to be reflecting on this occasion, this feast day, this season, for the next couple of daily meditations.

Today, at the heart of our meditation is a reminder about the importance of gratitude in our lives. And Thomas Aquinas really lays this virtue out, and he does call religion a virtue, not an institution, not a sociological construct, but a virtue, and so he's taking religion away, you might say, from any particular sociological construct, or institution, to the habits by which we live, that is what virtue is about: good habits.

And he's saying that religion resides primarily, therefore, in our consciousness and habits. And that one of these habits is the habit of religion, and how you define religion?

Religion is supreme thankfulness or gratitude.

And as people know, there's a big debate and movement about religion, as distinct from spirituality. And it's very clear, which side of that debate Aquinas is on. If religion is a virtue, then it is about a good habit that resides in people. It is not primarily about an institution. And where does gratitude come from?

Aquinas says:

The debt of gratitude flows from Charity.

...flows from charity.

So do we have a debt of gratitude to Mother Earth? And does that derive from charity, from our love for Earth, and from Earth's love for us? There's a sort of reverence follows from this love. He says,

It belongs to religion to show reverence to one God under a single aspect: namely, as the first principle of the creation and government of things.

So he's talking about the principle behind creation, behind existence, behind beings, including the being of Mother Earth. And of course, the being of the universe that birthed Mother Earth, the universe being 13.8 billion years, and the mother, the birther, of all of us.

Notice he's not saying religion is primarily about redemption. That was an idea that came in after the Black Death, the severe pandemic of the 14th century, which freaked people out and turned religion into defining itself almost exclusively as redemption, dealing with the fear of death that took over the consciousness of the Europeans at that time. When one out of two people died in the bubonic plague, there was great fear and angst, understandably. And before science and before vaccines and the rest. He says:

Gratitude is paid spontaneously, thanking, is less thankful when it is compelled.

So, gratitude is not an act of compulsion, and it's not based on fear, or reward. He says:

Gratitude depends chiefly on the heart--

...the heart...

...and that the primary purpose of the Sabbath is to give thanks for creation.

...give thanks for creation. The seventh day described in Genesis implies, he says, the command to remember to keep holy the Sabbath day is about giving thanks.

Religion is not just about gratitude, but "supreme gratitude," according to Aquinas. It's the ultimate act of gratitude, to give thanks for creation, for Mother Earth. It's this teaching from Aquinas, I think, that Eckhart turns into a succinct message when he says,

If the only prayer you say in your whole life is thank you, that would suffice.

That is how basic the virtue of gratitude is to our being here.

Of course, the opposite of gratitude is taking for granted. forgetfulness, taking and not giving back, refusing to give back even when you receive, refusing to return blessing for blessing, and goodness for goodness.

Thank you, we'll see you tomorrow.