

RCIA Lesson 2 – The Divine Maternity



“Blessed are those who abandon themselves into Our Lady’s hands. Their names are written in the Book of Life. ”St. Bonaventure - Franciscan, Doctor of the Church

"To serve Mary and to be her courtier is the greatest honour we can possibly possess. For to serve the Queen of Heaven is already to reign on high, and to live under her commands is a greater thing than to govern!" St. John Damascene - Patristic Father and One of the Thirty-three Doctors of the Church: Doctor of Christian Art and Doctor of the Assumption

"Let us not imagine that we obscure the glory of the Son by the great praise we lavish on His Mother. The more Mary is honoured, the greater is the glory of her Son." Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 -1153)

“We must look upon Mary as an accomplished model of every virtue and perfection that the Holy Spirit has fashioned in any simple creature. We will then be able to imitate her in the way suitable to each of us.” St. Louis Grignion de Montfort - True Devotion to Mary.

"When we speak the name of Mary, heaven becomes more beautiful, and earth rejoices. The demons are terrified, and vanish like dust in the wind" St. Francis of Assisi - For St. Francis the Blessed Virgin Mary was Mother, Advocate and Queen.

“In danger, anguish or doubt think of Mary and call upon her. Following her, you will never lose your way. Praying to her, you will never sink into despair. Contemplating her, you will never go wrong.” St. Bernard, saint, poet, writer, Doctor of the church and author of the famous Marian poem “Stella Maris” - Our Lady Star of the Sea.

Christian Stories – from the Catechist

86. S. Anthony in Temptation.—When S. Anthony retired from the world to the desert, he was subject to many temptations and assaults on the part of the devil. On one occasion he was so distressed that he exclaimed: “O my good Jesus! where wast Thou all this while?” Who replied and said: “I was here beside you: I saw your conflict and struggle: by My permission you were tempted; but fear not, fight bravely, for I am always near to help you!” These words filled his soul with peace.—His Life.

87. The Emperor and his Son.—The Greek Emperor Basil gave his son Leo this good advice: “Never, my son, will you regret a single action if, whenever you do anything, you only bear in mind that God sees and observes you: in this manner, neither in public nor in private, will you dare to do any guilty act. If you can escape the eyes of man, you cannot fly from the sight of God, who penetrates into the very depths of the heart.— Catéchisme en Exemples.

88. The Transparent Head.—A young man complained to a priest that he could not rid himself of impure thoughts. The priest replied: “Imagine your head is made of glass, and that everyone can read your thoughts!” “Oh,” sighed the young man, “I should die for very shame, could men but read my thoughts.” “Well,” continued the priest, “God sees more clearly what passes within us than man ever could through the brightest crystal: remember this, and you will easily overcome your temptations.” The young man followed this advice and soon triumphed over his enemy.—Kranzel.

89. Diderot’s Advice.—Even Diderot used to say: “We do not insist sufficiently upon the presence of God. If I had a child to bring up, I should make him look on the Divine Being in such a manner as to make it an effort to forget Him. Instead of quoting the example of a man—perhaps worse than himself—I should say plainly, ‘God hears you, and you dare to lie!’ Young folks require to be taken by the senses. If a gathering took place, I would set apart a place for God; if we were both together I would teach my child to say, ‘We were three; God, my father, and myself.’”

90. S. Thomas’ Reply.—When S. Thomas of Aquin was at the point of death, one of the brothers begged of him a rule of conduct, and the Saint replied: “Whoever walks always in the presence of God will never lose His friendship by consenting to sin.”

91. The Portrait.—A pagan woman was going to commit some crime, when she noticed before her the portrait of a man of virtue. Filled with shame and confusion, she went away, feeling as though this mortal being were looking at her with threatening aspect. How much more terrible is the eye of Him who sees the most secret thoughts of man!— Lohner.

LESSON 2

God and His Perfections

“I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH . . .”

8. What do we mean when we say that God is the Supreme Being?

When we say that God is the Supreme Being we mean that He is above all creatures, the self-existing and infinitely perfect Spirit.

(a) God is above all created things – the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, men, and angels. Some likeness of God is in every creature, from the highest to the lowest. The highest angel, however, is but a weak reflection of the infinite perfection of God, who is the infinite Creator and Governor of the universe.

SCRIPTURE: “I am who am” (Exodus 3:14). “I am the First, and I am the Last, and besides me there is no God” (Isaias 44:6).

9. What is a spirit?

A spirit is a being that has understanding and free will, but no body, and will never die. (a) The soul of man is a spirit which does not die because it is simple, having no integral parts, and because it is spiritual, that is, entirely independent of matter in its being and in its own proper acts; it does not depend on creatures for existence and cannot be destroyed by them.

10. What do we mean when we say that God is self-existing?

When we say that God is self-existing we mean that He does not owe His existence to any other being.

(a) God is the first and completely independent source of all being. Every other being is given existence, God is His own existence; God is His own life, or He who is.

(b) It is a manifest contradiction to hold that God, who is self-existent, could have been brought into being by anyone else.

SCRIPTURE: See Scripture, question 8, Exodus 3:14.

11. What do we mean when we say that God is infinitely perfect? When we say that God is infinitely perfect we mean that He has all perfections without limit.

(a) God has in Himself, in an eminent degree, the perfections of all things that ever existed or will or can exist. He is the cause of all perfection in creatures. The perfections of created things are in God in an infinitely superior manner.

(b) Every creature, even the highest angel, is finite for it has the limitation of dependence on the Creator for its existence.

SCRIPTURE: “Great is the Lord...and his greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 144:3).

12. What are some of the perfections of God?

Some of the perfections of God are: God is eternal, all-good, all-knowing, all-present, and almighty.

13. What do we mean when we say that God is eternal?

When we say that God is eternal we mean that He always was and always will be, and that He always remains the same.

(a) If God had a beginning or if He could cease to be, He would be limited and would not be infinitely perfect or self-existing. If God changed, the change would be either for the better or for the worse. In either case God would not be infinitely perfect.

(b) Spirits such as angels and the souls of men are eternal in the sense that they will live forever, but both angels and the souls of men, unlike God, had a beginning and are subject to change.

SCRIPTURE: "Before the mountains were brought forth and the earth and the world were born, and from everlasting to everlasting thou art, O God" (Psalm 89:2). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration" (James 1:17). " 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty' " (Apocalypse 1:8).

14. What do we mean when we say that God is all-good?

When we say that God is all-good we mean that He is infinitely lovable in Himself, and that from His fatherly love every good comes to us.

(a) Things are good and lovable in the degree that they are perfect. Since God is infinitely perfect, He is all-good and infinitely lovable in Himself, and all goodness of creatures must come from Him.

SCRIPTURE: "With whose beauty, if they being delighted, took them to be gods: let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they. For the first author of beauty made all those things" (Wisdom 13:3).

15. What do we mean when we say that God is all-knowing?

When we say that God is all-knowing we mean that He knows all things, past, present, and future, even our most secret thoughts, words, and actions.

(a) God's knowledge is not gained like ours, by proceeding step by step from things known to those unknown. By knowing Himself perfectly, God knows from eternity all things past, present, and future, and even all things possible. Every creature, in its actions, depends entirely on God, and any goodness in creatures is but an imperfect reflection of God's perfection. Through His infinitely perfect knowledge God knows the extent to which creatures share His perfections.

(b) God's knowledge of the future does not take away our freedom, but leaves our wills free to act or not to act.

(c) We are responsible for our free actions, which will be rewarded by God if they are good and punished by Him if they are evil.

SCRIPTURE: "Before man is life and death, good and evil: that which he shall choose shall be given him" (Ecclesiasticus 15:18). "Who hath been tried thereby, and made perfect, he shall have glory everlasting. He that could have transgressed, and hath not transgressed: and could do evil things and hath not done them" (Ecclesiasticus 31: 10). "The Lord knoweth all knowledge and hath beheld the signs of the world. He declareth the things that are past and the things that are to come, and revealeth the traces of hidden things" (Ecclesiasticus 42:19). "For I am God, and there is no god beside: neither is there the like to me" (Isaias 46:9). "And there is no creature hidden from his sight;

but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we have to give account” (Hebrews 4:13).

16. What do we mean when we say that God is all-present?

When we say that God is all-present we mean that He is everywhere.

(a) God is everywhere: first, by His power, inasmuch as all things are under His dominion; second, by His Presence, inasmuch as nothing is hidden from Him; third, by His essence, inasmuch as He is in all things as the cause of their being.

SCRIPTURE: “Whither may I go from thy spirit, or whither may I flee from thy face? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I lie down with the dead, thou art present. If I lay hold of the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the farthest part of the sea: Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 138:7-10).

17. If God is everywhere, why do we not see Him?

Although God is everywhere, we do not see Him because He is a spirit and cannot be seen with our eyes. (a) Although we cannot see God, the splendid order and beauty of creation should constantly remind us of His wisdom, His power, His goodness, and His nearness to us.

SCRIPTURE: “God is spirit, and they who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24).

18. Does God see us?

God sees us and watches over us with loving care.

SCRIPTURE: “The eyes of the Lord in every place behold the good and the evil” (Proverbs 15:3). “And as for clothing, why are you anxious? Consider how the lilies of the field grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which flourishes today but tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more you, O you of little faith! Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or, ‘What shall we drink?’ or, ‘What are we to put on?’ (for after all these things the Gentiles seek); for your Father knows that you need all these things” (Matthew 6:28-32).

19. What is God’s loving care for us called?

God’s loving care for us is called Divine Providence.

(a) Divine Providence is God’s plan for guiding every creature to its proper end.

SCRIPTURE: “All expect of thee, that thou give them food in season. What thou givest to them they gather up; when thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good. If thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; if thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. If thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth” (Psalm 103:27-30). “For God will not except any man’s person, neither will he stand in awe of any man’s greatness: for he made the little and the great, and he hath equally care of all” (Wisdom 6:8). “Cast all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

20. What do we mean when we say that God is almighty?

When we say that God is almighty we mean that He can do all things.

(a) God can do anything that is not opposed to His perfection, or that is not self-contradictory. The impossibility of God's doing anything wrong or acting falsely does not limit His divine power, since wrongdoing and falsity in themselves are evil and are manifest defects they cannot be associated with an infinitely perfect Being.

(b) Although God, the first cause of all things, actually does all things, He does not thereby deprive the creature of its power of causality nor of its freedom of action. A creature is never more than a secondary cause, that is, always dependent on God, always a finite being. When this secondary cause is intellectual, it is constituted by Almighty God as a free agent.

SCRIPTURE: "Whatsoever the Lord pleases, he does in heaven and on earth, in the sea, and in all the deeps" (Psalm 134:6). "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but thou wouldst not!" (Matthew 23:37). "For nothing shall be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

21. Is God all-wise, all-holy, all-merciful, and all-just? Yes, God is all-wise, all-holy, all-merciful, and all-just.

(a) God, the first cause of all things, in His wisdom knows these things perfectly and disposes them to their ends according to appropriate means.

(b) If we do not understand why or how God does certain things or permits them to happen, it is because our limited minds cannot understand His secrets nor see the universal plan of creation.

(c) Because God is all-holy, He is entirely free from all sin and imperfection and is infinitely good and lovable.

(d) Because God is all-merciful, He gives to each creature even more than is its due. He rewards the good more fully and punishes the wicked less severely than they deserve. He is always ready to help His creatures and to forgive repentant sinners.

(e) Because God is all-just, He gives to each creature what is due to it. God rewards the good and punishes the wicked partially in this life and more fully in eternity.

SCRIPTURE: "Be ye holy, because I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). "Thou art just, O Lord, and all thy judgments are just; and all thy ways mercy, and truth, and judgment" (Tobias 3:2). "The Lord is merciful and kind; slow to anger and plenteous in mercy" (Psalm 102:8). "The Lord is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psalm 144:17). "Of his wisdom there is no measure" (Psalm 146:5). "And they cried one to another, and said: Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of his glory" (Isaias 6:3). "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!" (Romans 11:33).

22. Can we know by our natural reason that there is a God?

We can know by our natural reason that there is a God, for natural reason tells us that the world we see about us could have been made only by a self-existing Being, all-wise and almighty.

SCRIPTURE: See Scripture, question 3, Psalm 18:2.

23. Can we know God in any other way than by our natural reason?

Besides knowing God by our natural reason, we can also know Him from supernatural revelation, that is, from the truths found in Sacred Scripture and in Tradition, which God Himself has revealed to us.

(a) Supernatural revelation is the communication of some truth by God to a creature through means that are beyond the ordinary course of nature. Some revealed truths, for example, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, are strictly beyond the power of the human mind. We could never know such truths unless God revealed them. Other truths, for example, the immortality of the soul, while not beyond the power of the human mind, are objects of revelation because God has revealed them in a supernatural way. Although these latter truths could be known without revelation, they are grasped with greater ease and certainty once God has revealed them.

(b) God's public revelation of truths to men began with Adam and Eve and ended at the death of Saint John the Apostle.

(c) Divine revelation contained in the Old Testament is called pre-Christian. It can be divided into: first, Primitive revelation, made to Adam and Eve; second, Patriarchal revelation, made to the patriarchs, for example, to Abraham and Lot; third, Mosaic revelation, made to Moses and the prophets.

(d) Christian revelation contains the truths revealed to us by Jesus Christ, either directly or through His apostles.

(e) The Church does not oblige the faithful to believe private revelations given, at certain times, to individuals. For our edification, however, the Church permits the publication of some private revelations. Those to whom private revelations are given are obliged to believe them when they are certain that the revelations are from God.

(f) Sacred Scripture, or the Bible, is the word of God written by men under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and contained in the books of the Old and the New Testament.

(g) Inspiration is the act by which God moves and directs the sacred writers faithfully to commit to writing all those things and only those things that He wishes them to write. The sacred writers act as free instruments of God, who is the principal author of Sacred Scripture.

(h) Tradition is the unwritten word of God – that body of truths revealed by God to the apostles, and not committed by them to writing but handed down by word of mouth. These truths, which were later committed to writing, particularly by the Fathers of the Church, have been preserved and handed down to the present day.

SCRIPTURE: "But I have called you friends, because all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). "There are, however, many other things that Jesus did; but if every one of these should be written, not even the world itself, I think; could hold the books that would have to be written" (John 21:25). "So then, brethren, stand firm, and hold the teachings that you have learned, whether by word or by letter of ours" (II Thessalonians 2:15). "All Scripture is inspired by God" (II Timothy 3:16). "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1).

IMPORTANT TRUTHS ABOUT GOD AND HIS PERFECTIONS

The most excellent knowledge that man can have is the knowledge of God. Our own natural reason tells us that there must be a Supreme Being who created the entire universe. He alone is existence; all other things are given existence by Him. With our natural reason we can know also that the Creator possesses all possible perfections or all good qualities. He is the cause of all perfection in creatures; hence, the perfections of all created things must be in Him in an infinitely superior manner to what they are in creatures. In order that men may know Him and His perfections more surely and more profoundly, God has given us divine revelations, which furnish us with clearer knowledge about His nature than reason could provide, and also manifest some truths about Him which natural reason could never learn by its own efforts.

The first of God's revelations for the human race were given to Adam and Eve, and God continued to make such revelations until the death of the last apostle, St. John. Since that time there have been no new revelations for all mankind, although there have been private revelations for certain individuals. Moreover, there has been a growth of public revelation in the sense that, as time went on, men have gradually come to a deeper and clearer knowledge of the truths which God revealed of old. Thus it was only after hundreds of years that Catholics clearly perceived that the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception is contained in revelation.

The revelations given by God for the human race are contained in Sacred Scripture, or the Bible which is the written word of God, and in divine Tradition, which is the unwritten word of God, since it was handed down, without being written, by those who received it from God, namely the apostles. The various perfections of God are mentioned in many passages of Scripture, as is evident from the many quotations from the Bible given in the preceding part of this lesson. Catholics should try to familiarize themselves with some of the principal texts which speak of God and of His infinite perfections. Moreover, the prayers employed or recommended by the Church abound with references to God and to His perfections.

The liturgy of the Mass frequently speaks of the wonderful qualities of the Most High. Some of God's perfections have a special relation to ourselves. For example, when we think of God's goodness we are inspired to love Him, not only because He is good to us but also because He is all-good in Himself. Thus we make an act of divine charity, the most excellent of the virtues. Again, the truth that God is all-present and hence always near us, should help us to avoid sin. The realization that God is all-knowing should remind us that He is aware of even our most secret thoughts and desires. The thought of His providence, of His loving care over us to help us to attain everlasting happiness, should inspire us to have unbounded confidence in Him. In trials and temptations we should remember that we are not alone; our loving Father is always near us.

RESOLUTION: Acquire the habit of remembering frequently that God is at your side and of concentrating briefly on one of His infinite perfections. Then in your heart make an act of adoration or of love.

God and His Perfections

Who is God?

I once read of a Sunday-school teacher who claimed to have lost his faith because a little child asked him, "Who made God?" and the teacher suddenly realized that he had no answer to that question. I find it hard to believe the incident, because it does seem that anyone intelligent enough to teach a Sunday-school class would know that the answer is "Nobody."

The principal proof for the existence of God lies in the fact that nothing happens unless something causes it to happen. Cookies don't disappear from the cookie jar unless someone's fingers snatched them. An oak tree doesn't grow up out of the ground unless an acorn was dropped there. The philosophers express it by saying, "Every effect must have a cause."

So if we trace the development of the physical universe back to its beginnings (a million years or a billion years, whatever the scientists want to make it), we eventually come to the point where we have to ask, "All right, but who started it all off? Somebody had to start things, or there would be no universe. From nothing, nothing comes." Babies come from parents, and flowers grow from seeds, but there has to be a starting point. There must be someone who wasn't made by anyone else. There must be someone who always existed, someone who never had a beginning. There must be someone of limitless power and intelligence whose very nature it is to exist.

There is such a someone—and that someone is exactly he whom we call God. God is he who exists by his very nature. The only exact description we can give of God is to say, "He is who is." So that the answer to the child who asks, "Who made God?" is simply, "No one made God. He always was, and he always will be."

We express this concept of God, this fact that he is the source of all being, above and beyond all else that exists, by saying that he is the Supreme Being. It follows that there can be but one God. To speak of two (or more) supreme beings would be a contradiction. The very word "supreme" means "above all others." If there were two equally powerful gods side by side, then neither of them would be supreme. Neither would have the infinite power which God by his nature must have. The "infinite" power of the one would cancel out the "infinite" power of the other. Each would be limited by the other. As St Athanasius puts it, "To speak of several equally powerful gods is like speaking of several equally powerless gods."

There is but one God—and he is a Spirit. To understand that we must know that philosophers distinguish two kinds of substances: spiritual substances and physical substances. A physical substance is one that is made up of parts. The air that we breathe, for example, is made up of nitrogen and oxygen. The nitrogen and oxygen in turn are made up of molecules, and the molecules of atoms, and the atoms of neutrons and protons. Every bit of the material universe is made up of physical substances. Physical substance has within itself the elements of its own dissolution, since its parts can be separated through corruption or destruction.

In a spiritual substance, however, there are no parts. There is nothing that can ever be broken up, or corrupted, or separated, or divided. This is expressed in philosophy by saying that a spiritual substance is a simple substance. And this is why a spiritual substance is immortal. Outside of a direct act of God, there is no way in which it can cease to exist.

There are three classes of spiritual substances which we know about. First of all there is God himself, the infinitely perfect Spirit. Then there are angels, and finally there are human souls. In each case

there is an intelligence without dependence upon physical substance for its actions. It is true that in this life our soul is united with a physical body, and is dependent upon the body for its activities. But this is not an absolute and permanent dependence. When disunited from the body at death, the soul still will function. It still will know and love, even more freely than during its mortal life.

If we want to try to imagine what a spirit is “like” (pretty difficult, since “to imagine” means “to picture,” and there is nothing to picture); if we want to grasp for an idea of a spirit, we can think of what we would be like if our body suddenly melted away. We still would be conscious of our own identity and personality; we still would retain all the knowledge that we have, all the loves that we have. We still would be me— but the body would be gone. We then would be a spirit.

If “spirit” is a hard word to deal with, “infinite” is even more difficult. “Infinite” means “not finite,” and “finite” in turn means “limited.” A thing is limited if there is an outermost boundary or capacity beyond which there is no passing. Everything created is limited in some fashion. There is a limit to the amount of water that the Pacific Ocean will hold. There is a limit to the energy of the hydrogen atom. There is a limit even to the holiness of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But with God there is no limit of any kind, no limit in any direction.

The catechism tells us that God is “an infinitely perfect Spirit.” This means that there is nothing good or desirable or worthwhile that is not found in God to an absolutely limitless degree. Indeed, it would be better to turn it around and say that there is nothing good or desirable or worthwhile in the universe that is not a reflection (a little “splinter” may we say?) of that same quality as it exists immeasurably in God. The beauty of a flower, for example, is a tiny reflection of God’s unbounded beauty—much as a fugitive moonbeam is a tiny reflection of the blazing light of the sun.

The perfections of God are of the very substance of God. If we wish to speak with precise accuracy, we do not say that “God is good.” Rather we say, “God is goodness.” God, strictly speaking, is not wise; God is wisdom.

We cannot hope to discuss here all of the wonderful perfections of God, but at least let us look at a few of them. We already have touched upon one of God’s perfections—his eternity. Men and angels may be said to be eternal, in so far as they will never die. But they did have a beginning and are subject to change. Only God is eternal in the absolute sense; not only will he never die, but never was there a time when he did not exist. He always will be—as he always was, without change forever.

God, as we have said, is infinite goodness. There is absolutely no limit to his goodness. Such is his infinite goodness that to see him will be to love him with an irresistible love. And his goodness pours itself out continually upon us.

Someone may ask, “If God is so good, why does he allow so much suffering and evil in the world? Why does he allow wars and crimes and sickness and misery?” Whole books have been written on the problem of evil, and we cannot hope to do justice to the subject here. We can point out however, that evil—physical as well as moral—as it affects human beings, came into the world as a consequence of man’s sin. Having set his plan for mankind in motion, having given man a free will, God does not keep constantly stepping in to snatch back his gift of freedom. With the free will that God has given us, we must work out our destiny together until the end—with the help of God’s grace if we will accept and use it—toward everlasting happiness if we so direct ourselves, but freely to the end.

Evil is man's idea, not God's. And if the innocent and the good must suffer from the depravity of the wicked, their reward in the end will be the greater. Their pains and their tears will be as nothing in the joy that will come. Meanwhile, God has always in his keeping those who have God in their hearts.

Next there is the fact of God's infinite knowledge. All of time—past, present and future; all things that are and all things that even could be; all possible knowledge, is what we might call “just one big thought” in the mind of God. All of time and all of creation is encompassed within the mind of God, somewhat as the infant is encompassed within the mother's womb.

Does God know what I am going to do tomorrow? Yes. And next week? Yes. Then doesn't that mean that I have to do it? Isn't that the end of free will? If God knows that I am going to visit Aunt Gussie on Tuesday, how can I help doing it?

That apparent difficulty, which a moment's thought will resolve, stems from confusing God as a knower with God as a causer. God's knowing that I shall go to Aunt Gussie's isn't what makes me go there. It is the other way around. It is my choosing to go to Aunt Gussie's that provides the occasion for God's knowing it. The fact that the weatherman, studying his maps, knows that it is going to rain tomorrow is not what makes the rain fall. On the contrary, it is the fact that rain is going to fall that provides the weatherman with the occasion, the indispensable condition for knowing it.

To be theologically exact, we should take note of the fact that, absolutely speaking, God is the cause of all that is and of all that happens. He is, by his very nature, the first cause. That means that nothing exists and nothing happens that does not have its origin in God's infinite power. Here, however, there is no need to enter into a discussion of the philosophical question of causality. It is enough for our purpose to know that God's foreknowledge does not oblige me to do what I freely will to do.

Another perfection of God is that there is no limit to his presence; we say that he is “omnipresent.” He is everywhere, all the time. How could it be otherwise, since there is no place outside of God? He is here in my room as I write, he is in your room as you read. If ever a space ship succeeds in reaching Mars or Venus, the pilot will not find himself alone when he gets to his planet; God will be there.

This limitless presence of God, be it noted, has nothing to do with size. Size is concerned only with physical matter. “Big” and “little” are meaningless terms when applied to any spirit, much less to God. No, it is not that one part of God is in one place and part in another. All of God is everywhere. In reference to God, space is as meaningless as size.

Another perfection of God is his infinite power. He is almighty; he can do or make anything. “Can he draw a square circle?” someone asks. No, because a square circle is not a something, it is a no-thing, a contradiction in terms, like a daylight night. “Can God commit a sin?” Again no, because sin too is a no-thing, a failure to give obedience to God. In short, God can do anything, but he does not do no-things.

God is infinitely wise too. He made all things in the first place, so certainly he knows best how to use the things which he has made, how best to plan for his creatures. One who is tempted to complain, “Why does God do that?” or “Why doesn't God do so-and-so?” should remember that an ant has more right to criticize an Einstein than has man with his limited intelligence to question the infinite wisdom of God.

The infinite holiness of God scarcely needs remarking. The spiritual beauty of him from whom all human holiness flows, we take for granted. We know that even the spotless holiness of the Blessed Virgin Mary, when compared to the dazzling splendour of God, would be like a match flame compared to the sun.

And God is all-merciful. As often as we repent, so often will God forgive. There is a limit to your patience and mine, but no limit to the infinite mercy of God. Yet he also is infinitely just. God is not a doting grandmother, closing his eyes to our sins. He wants us in heaven, but his mercy cannot defeat his justice if we refuse him the love which is the purpose of our being. All of this, and more, is what we mean when we say that "God is an infinitely perfect Spirit."

Ave Maria Lesson 2 Concluded