

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
FRIDAY OF THE THIRTY-SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
MEMORIAL OF SAINT ALBERT THE GREAT, BISHOP & DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
BETHLEHEM UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, I am happy to gather for Mass with you once again in this Basilica. I bring you the greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the presence of the Board of Directors of the Bethlehem University Foundation.

Today the Church remembers Saint Albert the Great, a bishop and doctor of the Church. This thirteenth century Dominican is most famous for being the teacher of Saint Thomas Aquinas, but he was also a renowned theologian and philosopher in his own right. For his age, he was a Master of the Natural Sciences and is honored by the Church as the patron saint of scientists. His powerful intercession is needed now more than ever as many young people fall away from the Church, viewing faith and reason or faith and science as being incompatible. Scientism, a type of ideology that suggests that things can only be known through the scientific method, rejects the idea of knowledge through faith and is becoming dominant.

In the person of Albert the Great, we find a man who came to knowledge of God through science (*ad Deum per scientiam*). His own pursuit of the truth through his observation, description and classification of nature opened the door for many forms of scientific research. These same observations led him to a deeper relationship with the God who made them all. Indeed, Saint Albert helps us to appreciate that which is often lost in the modern world – a profound sense of wonder and awe before creation and before the Creator.

Reflecting on Saint Albert, Pope Benedict XVI said:

“A man of faith and prayer, as was St. Albert the Great, can serenely foster the study of the natural sciences and progress in knowledge of the micro and macrocosm, discovering the laws proper to a subject, since all this contributes to fostering thirst and love of God. The Bible speaks to us of creation as the first language through which God who is supreme intelligence, who is the Logos reveals to us something of Himself. The Book of Wisdom, for example, says the phenomena of nature, endowed with grace and beauty, is like the work of an artist, which, by analogy, we may know the Author of Creation. (cf. Wisdom 13:5)” (Pope Benedict XVI, Wednesday Audience, 24 March 2010)

Our first reading today, taken from the beginning of the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Wisdom touches precisely upon this. All men were foolish in their ignorance of God. Although they tried to study his works, they did not discern the Divine Artist. Some worshipped fire, wind, air, the stars and water as gods, but, in fact, these were not gods. The author of the Book of Wisdom then tells us directly: *Now if out of joy in their beauty they thought them gods, let them know how far more excellent is the Lord than*

these; for the original source of beauty fashioned them. ...From the greatness and beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen.

Whether we are at the Catholic University of America or Bethlehem University, we ought to ponder these words. How often students can be concerned with grades or workers can be obsessed with productivity! How often we forget to pursue that which is true, good, and beautiful – even in nature! Saint Thomas, the prized pupil of Saint Albert, said that creation is neither a movement, nor a mutation; rather, it is the foundational and continuing relationship that links the creature to the Creator, for he is the cause of every being and all becoming (cf. ST I, q. 45, art. 3)

Think about how much scientific knowledge we have. Yet, why are people so miserable? Perhaps, it is because we have forgotten our relationship to the God who made all things. How often we forget that to seek Wisdom is to seek the Face of God! How much more excellent is the Lord than all His created works!

The natural world helps us appreciate the beauty of creation. For the Scholastics, beauty was a transcendental: that is, it pertained to each and every existent thing in so far as it existed at all. The beauty of a thing was a mark of its reality. To be struck by something beautiful is to be transfixed by its reality, to be attracted or captivated by it.

Beauty was closely connected with two other ideas: *form* and *splendor*. Works of art not only form a coherent vision, bringing together in the right proportions, colors, materials, compositions or textures, but they also contain that which evokes a sense of wonder, captivating us and drawing us deeper into contemplation. The same can be said of the splendor of the natural world – a beautiful vista or landscape. For that matter, we all ought to look at a newborn child! What form! What splendor! What complexity! A child is innocent and beautiful.

Beauty attracts. It does not impose. A beautiful sunset, a view from a mountaintop, and a starry night, lead us to ask: “Who made all these things?” – a question that guides humanity in its search for the Divine. The beauty of an encounter with God – which is often so powerful and profound that it cannot be put into words and images – can be truly liberating. The beauty of Christ, known through such an encounter, draws us to be His disciples in words and action, serving as a remedy against a culture dominated by technology or motivated by pure efficiency.

Saint Albert the Great was a rigorous scientist. Scientific truth, after all, as a participation in divine Truth, can help us understand more fully the human person and God’s revelation about man, a Revelation which is completed and perfected in Christ Jesus. Although Albert was an exacting scholar of philosophy, theology, and the sciences, he also understood that “book knowledge” or “head knowledge” was not enough.

To truly be happy, a person had to discover his or her vocation – that is, to have “emotional knowledge”, which points out the call to eternal joy, joy which flows from adherence to the Truth, which is no mere fact or idea, but which is a Person. Jesus is our Way, Truth, and Life. What we learn from Him is something that we cannot learn in a book – how to love! As we celebrate the sacrifice of Calvary, let us learn from the Divine Master how to love and let us adore Him as God with eyes captivated by the wonder of His love.