

COMMENTARY ON  
THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

St. Thomas Aquinas

## Lectio 10

16 ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν, καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος:  
17 ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ μωϋσέως ἐδόθη,  
ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο.

Sequitur *et de plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus*. Verba ista usque ad locum illum *et hoc est testimonium Ioannis*, dupliciter inseruntur. Nam, secundum Origenem, sunt verba prolata a Ioanne Baptista, et subduntur ab eo quasi in argumentum praemissorum; quasi dicat: vere *prior me erat*, quia *de plenitudine eius*, scilicet gratiarum, non solum ego, sed etiam *omnes*, prophetae et patres, *accepimus*, quia omnes gratiam quam habuerunt, habuerunt per fidem incarnati verbi. Et secundum hoc, ab illo loco *Ioannes testimonium perhibet* etc., incepit texere exordium suae incarnationis.

Secundum Augustinum autem et Chrysostomum, sunt verba Ioannis Evangelistae ab hoc quod dicitur *Ioannes testimonium perhibet*; et tunc continuatur ad hoc quod dixerat *plenum gratiae et veritatis*, ut dicatur sic: supra Evangelista ostendit evidentiam verbi, quae innotuit et per visum, et per auditum, hic vero utrumque explicat: et primo quomodo apostolis innotuit visu, quasi a Christo accipientibus; secundo quomodo Ioannes testificatus est de eo, ibi *et hoc est testimonium Ioannis*. Circa primum duo facit. Primo ostendit Christum esse fontalem originem omnis spiritualis gratiae; secundo ostendit derivatam in nos gratiam per ipsum et ab ipso, ibi *et gratiam pro gratia*.

## LECTURE 10

16 Of his fullness we have all received—indeed, grace upon grace;  
17 because, while the law was given through Moses,  
grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.

200 He follows with, **Of his fullness we have all received** words and those that follow to (v 19), “This is the testimony of John,” are taken in two ways. According to Origen, these are the words of John the Baptist and are added by him to support what he had said previously. It is as though he said: Truly, **he existed before me**, because **of his fullness**, i.e., of his grace, not only I but all, including the prophets and patriarchs, **have received**, because all had the grace they possessed by faith in the incarnate Word. According to this explanation, John the Baptist began weaving the story of the incarnation at, “John bore witness to him” (v 15).

But according to Augustine and Chrysostom, the words from “John bore witness to him” (v 15), are those of John the Evangelist. And they are connected with the previous words, “full of grace and truth,” as though he were saying: Above, the Evangelist gave the evidence for the Word which was learned through sight and by hearing, but here he explains each. First, how he was made known to the apostles through sight, which was tantamount to receiving the evidence from Christ. Secondly, how John bore witness to him, at “This is the testimony of John” (v 19). As to the first he does two **things**. First, he shows that Christ is the origin, as a fountain, of

Dicit ergo primo: experimento patet, quod vidimus eum *plenum gratiae et veritatis*, quia *de plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus*. Est autem plenitudo sufficientiae, qua aliquis est sufficiens ad actus meritorios et excellentes faciendos, sicut in Stephano. Item est plenitudo redundantiae, qua beata virgo excellit omnibus sanctis, propter eminentiam, et abundantiam meritorum. Est etiam plenitudo efficientiae et effluentiae, quae soli homini Christo competit, quasi auctori gratiae. Sic enim beata virgo redundavit gratiam in nos, ut tamen auctrix gratiae nequaquam esset, sed ab anima eius gratia redundavit in carnem; nam per spiritus sancti gratiam, non solum mens virginis fuit Deo per amorem perfecte unita, sed eius uterus a spiritu sancto est supernaturaliter impraegnatus. Et ideo statim cum dixisset Gabriel, *ave gratia plena*, subiunxit de plenitudine ventris, dicens *dominus tecum*. Ut ergo Evangelista hanc singularem plenitudinem redundantiae et efficientiae de Christo ostenderet, dixit *de plenitudine eius omnes accepimus*, scilicet omnes apostoli, et patriarchae, et prophetae, et iusti, qui fuerunt, sunt et erunt, et etiam omnes Angeli.

Nota, quod haec praepositio de aliquando quidem denotat efficientiam, seu originalem causam, sicut cum dicitur, radius est vel procedit de sole; et hoc modo denotat in Christo efficientiam gratiae, seu auctoritatem, quia plenitudo gratiae, quae est in Christo, est causa omnium gratiarum quae sunt in omnibus intellectualibus creaturis. Eccli. c. XXIV, 26: *venite ad me, omnes, qui concupiscitis me, et a generationibus meis*, quae scilicet de me procedunt, *adimplemini*, participatione sufficientis plenitudinis.

Aliquando autem haec praepositio de denotat consubstantialitatem, ut cum dicitur, filius est de patre; et secundum hoc plenitudo Christi est spiritus sanctus, qui procedit ab eo consubstantialis ei in natura, in virtute et maiestate. Quamvis enim dona habitualia alia sint in anima Christi quam ea quae sunt in nobis, tamen spiritus sanctus, qui est in ipso, unus et idem replet omnes sanctificandos. I Cor. XII, 11: *haec omnia operatur unus atque idem spiritus*;

every spiritual grace. Secondly, he shows that grace is dispensed to us through him and from him.

201 He says first of all: We know from our own experience that we have seen him full of grace and truth, because **of his fullness we have all received**. Now one fullness is that of sufficiency, by which one is able to perform acts that are meritorious and excellent, as in the case of Stephen. Again, there is a fullness of superabundance, by which the Blessed Virgin excels all the saints because of the eminence and abundance of her merits. Further, there is a fullness of efficiency and overflow, which belongs only to the man Christ as the author of grace. For although the Blessed Virgin superabounds her grace into us, it is never as authoress of grace. But grace flowed over from her soul into her body: for through the grace of the Holy Spirit, not only was the mind of the Virgin perfectly united to God by love, but her womb was supernaturally impregnated by the Holy Spirit. And so after Gabriel said, “Hail, full of grace,” he refers at once to the fullness of her womb, adding, “the Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28). And so the Evangelist, in order to show this unique fullness of efficiency and overflow in Christ, said, **Of his fullness we have all received**, i.e., all the apostles and patriarchs and prophets and just men who have existed, do now exist, and will exist, and even all the angels.

202 Note that the preposition *de* [of, from] sometimes signifies efficiency, i.e., an originative cause, as when it is said that a ray is or proceeds “from” the sun. In this way it signifies the efficiency of grace in Christ, i.e., authorship, because the fullness of grace in Christ is the cause of all graces that are in intellectual creatures. “Come to me, all you who desire me, and be filled with my fruits,” that is to say, share in the fullness of those fruits which come from me (Si 24:26).

But sometimes this preposition *de* signifies consubstantiality, as when it is said that the Son is “of” the Father [*de Patre*]. In this usage, the fullness of Christ is the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from him, consubstantial with him in nature, in power and in majesty. For although the habitual gifts in the soul of Christ are other than those in us, nevertheless it is one and the same Holy Spirit who is in him and who fills all those to be sanctified. “One and the

Ioel. II, 28: *effundam de spiritu meo super omnem carnem*; Rom. c. VIII, 9: *si quis spiritum Christi non habet, hic non est eius*. Nam unitas spiritus sancti facit in Ecclesia unitatem; Sap. I, 7: *spiritus domini replevit orbem terrarum*.

Tertio modo haec praepositio de denotat partialitatem, sicut cum dicimus, accipe de hoc pane, vel vino, idest partem accipe, et non totum; et hoc modo accipiendo, notat in accipientibus partem de plenitudine derivari. Ipse enim accepit omnia dona spiritus sancti sine mensura, secundum plenitudinem perfectam; sed nos de plenitudine eius partem aliquam participamus per ipsum; et hoc secundum mensuram, quam unicuique Deus divisit. Eph. IV, 7: *unicuique autem nostrum data est gratia, secundum mensuram donationis*.

Deinde cum dicit *et gratiam pro gratia* ostendit derivationem gratiarum in nos per Christum. Ubi duo facit. Primo ostendit quod accepimus gratiam a Christo, eo auctore; secundo accepimus ab eo sapientiam, ibi *Deum nemo vidit unquam*. Circa primum duo facit.

Primo ostendit quod de plenitudine eius accepimus; secundo necessitatem accipiendi ostendit, ibi *quia lex per Moysen data est* et cetera. Dicit autem primo quod accepimus de plenitudine Christi hoc quod dico *et gratiam pro gratia*. Sed per hoc quod ponitur, cogimur intelligere quod de plenitudine eius accepimus gratiam, et pro illa gratia accepimus aliam; et ideo videndum est quae sit prima gratia, pro qua secundam accepimus, et quae ipsa secunda.

Secundum Chrysostomum autem, prima gratia, quam totum genus humanum accepit, fuit gratia veteris testamenti accepta in lege, quae quidem magna fuit, iuxta illud Prov. IV, v. 2: *donum bonum tribuam vobis* et cetera. Magnum enim fuit quod hominibus idolatris data sunt praecepta a Deo, et unius veri Dei vera cognitio; Rom. III, 1: *quid amplius Iudaeo, aut quae utilitas circumcisionis? Multum quidem per omnem modum. Primum quidem quia credita sunt eis*

same Spirit produces all these” (1 Cor 12:11); “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (Jl 2:28); “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (Rom 8:9). For the unity of the Holy Spirit produces unity in the Church: “The Spirit of the Lord filled the whole world” (Wis 1:7).

In a third way, the preposition de [of, from] can signify its portion, as when we say “take ‘from’ this bread or wine [*de hoc pane, vel vino*],” i.e., take a portion and not the whole. Taken in this way it signifies that those who take a part derive it from the fullness. For he [Christ] received all the gifts of the Holy Spirit without measure, according to a perfect fullness; but we participate through him some portion of his fullness; and this is according to the measure which God grants to each. “Grace has been given to each of us according to the degree to which Christ gives it” (Eph 4:7).

203 Then when he says, **grace upon grace**, he shows the distribution of graces into us through Christ. Here he does two things. First, he shows that we receive grace from Christ, as its author. Secondly, that we receive wisdom from him (1:18). As to the first he does two things. First, he shows that we have received of his fullness. Secondly, our need to receive it.

204 First, he says that we have received of the fullness of Christ what is described as **grace upon grace**. In the light of what is said, we are forced to understand that of his fullness we have received grace, and that upon that grace we have received another. Accordingly, we must see what that first grace is upon which we have received a second one, and also what that second grace is.

According to Chrysostom, the first grace, which was received by the whole human race, was the grace of the Old Testament received in the law. And this was indeed a great grace: “I will give you a good gift” (Prv 4:2). For it was a great benefit for idolatrous men to receive precepts from God, and a true knowledge of the one true God. “What is the advantage of being a Jew, or the benefit of circumcision? It is great in every way. First indeed, because the words of God were entrusted to them” (Rom 3:1). Upon that grace, then,

*eloquia Dei.* Pro gratia ergo ista, quae prima fuit, secundam longe meliorem accepimus; Zach. IV, 7: *exaequabit gratiae.*

Sed numquid non sufficiebat prima gratia? Respondeo dicendum, quod non, quia per legem solum cognitio peccati datur, non ablatio. *Neminem enim ad perfectum adduxit lex,* Hebr. VII, 19. Et ideo erat necesse quod alia gratia peccata auferens, et reconcilians Deo, veniret.

Et ideo dicit *quia lex per Moysen data est; gratia et veritas per Iesum Christum facta est.* Ubi Evangelista praefert Christum legislatori Moysi, quem Baptista sibi praetulerat. Moyses autem reputabatur maximus prophetarum; Deut. ult., 10: *non surrexit ultra propheta in Israel sicut Moyses.* Praefert autem eum Moysi, quantum ad excellentiam et dignitatem operum *quia per Moysen lex data est;* et horum duorum, tantum unum excellit alium, quantum figuratum excellit figuram et veritas ipsam umbram. *Umbram enim habuit lex futurorum bonorum* etc.; Hebr. X, 1. Item excellit quantum ad modum operandi: quia lex data est per Moysen, sicut ut per proponentem, non per facientem; quia, *solus dominus est legifer noster:* Is. XXXIII, v. 22. *Gratia autem, et veritas facta est per Christum,* sicut per dominum et auctorem veritatis et gratiae, ut supra expositum est.

Secundum Augustinum vero, prima est iustificans et praeveniens, quae non datur nobis ex operibus; Rom. XI, 6: *si autem gratia, iam non ex operibus.* Pro ista ergo gratia, scilicet imperfecta, accepimus aliam gratiam consummatam, scilicet aeternae vitae. Et quamvis aeterna vita aliquo modo meritis acquiratur, tamen quia principium merendi in omnibus est gratia praeveniens, ideo vita aeterna dicitur gratia; Rom. VI, 23: *gratia Dei vita aeterna.* Et, ut breviter concludatur, quicquid praevenienti gratiae de gratia additur, totum gratia pro gratia dicitur.

Necessitas autem secundae gratiae est ex insufficientia legis, quae ostendebat quid faciendum et quid cavendum erat; sed ad implendum ea quae praecipiebat, non praebebat auxilium; immo per occasionem operabatur mortem quae tamen

which was first, we have received a second far better. “He will follow grace with grace” (Zec 4:7).

But was not the first grace sufficient? I answer that it was not, because the law gives only a knowledge of sin, but does not take it away. “The law brought nothing to perfection” (Heb 7:19). Hence it was necessary that another grace come that would take away sin and reconcile one with God.

205 And so he says, **because, while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.** Here the Evangelist ranks Christ above Moses the lawgiver, whom the Baptist ranked above himself. Now Moses was regarded as the greatest of the prophets: “There did not arise again in Israel a prophet like Moses” (Dt 34:10). But he ranks Christ above Moses in excellence *in* dignity of works, **because the law was given through Moses;** and between these two, the One excels the other as the reality excels the symbol and the truth the shadow: “The law had a shadow of the good things to come” (Heb 10:1). Further, Christ excels him in the way he works, because the law was given by Moses as by one proclaiming it, but not originating it; for “The Lord alone is our lawgiver” (Is 33:22). But **grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ,** as through the Lord and Author of truth and grace, as was explained above.

206 According to Augustine, however, the first grace is justifying and prevenient grace, which is not given to us because of our works: “If it is by grace, it is not now by works” (Rom 11:6). Upon that grace, then, which is imperfect, we have received another grace which is perfect, i.e., the grace of eternal life. And although eternal life is in some way acquired by merits, nevertheless, because the principle of meriting in everyone is prevenient grace, eternal life is called a grace: “The grace of God is eternal life” (Rom 6:23). To be brief, whatever grace is added to prevenient grace, the whole is called **grace upon grace.**

The need for this second grace arises from the insufficiency of the law, which showed what was to be done and what avoided; but it gave no help to fulfill what was commanded. Indeed, what seemed to have been directed to

videbatur fuisse ad vitam; apostolus, Rom. VII, 10, et II Cor. III, v. 9, dicit, legem ministram fuisse mortis: *nam si ministratio damnationis in gloria est, multo magis abundat ministerium iustitiae in gloria*. Item promittebat auxilium gratiae, sed non solvebat, quia *neminem ad perfectum adducit lex*, ut dicitur Hebr. VII, 19. Item per sacrificia et caeremonias veritatem novae gratiae figurabat, ipso suo ritu clamans eam figuram; et ideo necesse fuit quod Christus veniret, qui per mortem propriam alienas mortes perimeret, et conferret auxilium novae gratiae, ut faciliter et delectabiliter adimpleremus praecepta, et moreremur transgressioni et conversationi antiquae; Rom. VI, 6: *vetus homo noster simul crucifixus est* et cetera. Item ut manifestaretur veritas figurarum contentarum in lege, et ut promissiones factae patribus solverentur; II Cor. I.

Vel aliter, *veritas per Christum facta est*, quantum ad sapientiam et veritatem occultam a saeculis, quam veniens in mundum aperte docuit, infra XVIII, v. 37: *in hoc natus sum, et ad hoc veni in mundum, ut testimonium perhibeam veritati*.

Sed si ipse Christus est veritas, ut infra XIV, 6 dicitur, quomodo per ipsum facta est veritas, cum nihil possit fieri a seipso? Respondeo, dicendum est, quod ipse est per suam essentiam veritas increata; quae aeterna est, et non facta, sed a patre est genita; sed per ipsum factae sunt omnes veritates creatae, quae sunt quaedam participationes et refulgentiae primae veritatis, quae in animabus sanctis relucent.

life was the occasion for producing death. Hence the Apostle says that the law was a minister of death: “If the ministry that condemned had glory, the ministry that justifies has much more glory” (2 Cor 3:9). Also, it promised the help of grace but did not fulfill, because “The law brought nothing to perfection” (Heb 7:19). Again, it prefigured the truth of the new grace by its sacrifices and ceremonies; indeed, its very rites proclaimed that it was a figure. Hence it was necessary that Christ come, who by his own death would destroy other deaths and grant the help of new grace, in order that we might both fulfill his precepts with ease and joy, and die to our sins and our old way of life: “Our old self was crucified with him” (Rom 6:6), and in order that the truth of the figures contained in the law might be revealed and the promises made to the fathers be fulfilled.

This can be explained in another way: **truth has come through Jesus Christ**, as to the wisdom and truth which was hidden for centuries, and which he openly taught when he came into the world: “I came into the world for this, to testify to the truth,” as we read below (18:37).

207 But if Christ is the Truth, as it says below (14:6), how did truth come [i.e., come to be, be made] through him, because nothing can make itself? I answer that by his essence he is the uncreated Truth, which is eternal and not made, but is begotten of the Father; but all created truths were made through him, and these are certain participations and reflections of the first Truth, which shines out in those souls who are holy.