

## St. Thomas' Spirituality: Tenth Talk: Poetry: Adoro Te Devote

Thomas wrote this hymn for private devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament. It is a favorite.

Adoro Te Devote	Devoutly I adore thee	Literal Translation
Adoro te devote latens veritas, Quae sub figuris vere latitas: Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit, Quia te contemplans totum deficit.	Devoutly I adore thee, O my Lord, Who art concealed in figures at the board; To thee my heart bows down in voiceless faith; I see thee not, but I believe thy word.	I adore you, deep-hidden truth Who truly hides under forms To you I give all my heart Which can't see you at all.
Visus, gustus, tactus in te fallitur, Sed auditu solo tuto creditur: Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius: Nil hoc Veritatis verbo verius.	Sight, touch and taste are easily deceived; Thy word alone can safely be believed; I grant, O Son of God, whate'er to me Thou sayest; in thee have I all faith achieved.	Sight, taste & touch fail Only hearing can be believed I believe what you said, God's Son Is not this Truth true word?
In cruce latebat sola Deitas, At hic latet simul et humanitas: Ambo tamen credens, atque confitens, Peto quod petivit latro poenitens.	Upon the cross was thy divinity Concealed, nor here thy human form we see, Yet I, in faith confessing, seek thee, Lord, Like the repentant thief upon the tree.	On the cross only divinity hid Nor here is seen your humanity Both to believe and confess I ask like the penitent thief.
Plagas, sicut Thomas, non intueor, Deum tamen meum te confiteor: Fac me tibi semper magis credere In te spem habere, te diligere.	I do not ask, as Thomas did, dear Lord, To see thy wounds; sufficient is thy word; O, fill my soul with firmer faith, that still In hope and love with thee it may accord.	I don't ask, like Thomas, to see My dear God; I believe you: Make me ever believe more To hope and love you.
O memoriale mortis Domini, Panis vivus vitam praestans homini: Praesta meae menti de te vivere, Et te illi semper dulce sapere.	O sweet memorial of the Savior's death, True bread that brings to man the living breath, Grant that my soul thy holy law may know, And live with thee in everlasting faith.	O memorial of the Lord's death Living bread, life to man Grant my mind to live on you And to know you for ever.
Pie Pellicane, Jesu Domine, Me immundum munda tuo sanguine, Cujus una stilla salvum facere Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.	A pitying pelican, dear Jesus, be; Save by the blood thou sheddest on the tree, My starving soul, thy precious blood, whereof One drop from every crime the world can free.	Caring pelican, Lord Jesus Save me by your blood Whose one drop can save All the world from crime.
Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio, Oro fiat illud quod tam sitio: Ut te revelata cernens facie, Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae.	Jesus, whom here in figures I behold, I hunger for the time to see unrolled The veil from thy sweet features; let me be Blest with the vision in thy halls of gold.	Jesus I see you now hidden I ask that for which I thirst As you reveal yourself for sure Bless me to see your glory.

A glance at the literal translation shows that what Thomas wrote is so poetic that a straight translation does not convey the meaning imbedded in this lovely poem. Experts in Latin have not been able to produce a suitable translation because much of the meaning is carried in inflections of the words. English does not put much meaning in word endings, or inflections, so we need to insert extra words to say what Latin says by tacked on syllables. That's why the poetic translation is so much longer than the original Latin.

What is clear is that this personal devotional poem is loaded with meaning. For example, Thomas alludes to the devout pelican. That stumps us because we do not savor the tradition that lived at his time. The

mother pelican, like all true mothers, would rather that her young live than that she live. So if she cannot supply the usual fish for her chicks, she pecks a hole in her chest. Blood flows out, nourishing the little ones. Since the apostles all died for Christ and His followers, they all gave their lives as the pelican did. Down through the centuries, Church leaders have offered their lives in bloody or un-bloody sacrifice. It is the way of Christ, the way of the cross. Since Jesus started it, we revere this practice. The pelican is a fine example of the true lover giving his life for the beloved. Since love is the universal dynamic, everything fits together into a synthesis.

As Thomas lay dying, his appreciation for Christ's love overflowed into reflection upon the Song of Songs. As Augustine pointed out 800 years before Thomas: "To sing is to pray twice". Singing is the epitome of speaking. Singing requires us to compose a meaningful message in beautiful language, then fit a lovely tune to this poem. Thomas did that with several messages because he realized that we spend a lot of time learning, then we can teach about what we have learned, then we should praise God, in poetry and even song. This is the culmination of our development in the love of God. A person must be rather humble to undertake all this work, as Thomas was. Then God can perfect praise in the person as humble as a child.

Fr. George Rutler develops these themes in his *Brightest and Best*, a review of excellent hymns. Fr. Rutler penetrates to the heart of Thomas by seeing that he lived theology. He was a theologian on his knees, instead of a theologian giving press conferences. Fr. Rutler shows that this life of prayer produced profound humility, thereby saving Thomas from "the arid fate of many theologians who dissect theology without living it", p 67. Because Thomas lived theology, he comprehended more about the Blessed Sacrament than most people ever learn. That enabled him to produce a poem that is so synthesized that we can't translate it accurately enough. Even the great poet Fr. Gerald Manley Hopkins left some treasures unexcavated in this poem. Fr. Rutler gives the example that "*adoro te devote latens veritas*" says "I adore you devoutly hidden truth". Some arrangements of this poem substitute *Deitas* for *veritas*, because we should worship God alone. Later in this poem, Thomas refers again to God as believable because He is VERITAS, or TRUTH. This consistency adds to the synthesis of this poem. It emphasizes that Thomas paid attention to existence, as it acts, then he acted along with what's happening. This is the identity of knower and known, and the identity of lover and beloved.

Living this identity enabled Thomas to become wise. So Fr. Rutler reminds us that many biographers of Thomas applied to him the complement from Wisdom 4: 13-14: "He lived a long life in a short time, and because God loved him, He took him". All that we have reviewed about Thomas shows this angelic clarity, due to profound prayer. Though we may not serve our fellow followers of Christ as fully as Thomas did, we can pray and grow to our maximum. This poem, set to music can help. The music printed here is modern notation of the ancient Gregorian chant. It flows more harmoniously with the meaning and words than many substitute tunes. If you fit the Latin words to the tune, you will find even more harmony.

The English words in the notes you have must follow the tune, yet express the meaning in a quite different language. Gerald Manley Hopkins made a masterful poem in English to convey most of the meaning fitted so elegantly into Latin. Hidden behind the words in any of the four versions on these pages is a profound distinction. We can make that distinction by observing that the first thing we notice about this piece of paper is its color. But is all paper this color? Obviously not. Remember that Thomas works with the obvious distinctions because they are the most reliable. Since paper is equally paper whether it's white or black, or green, color is incidental to paper. It is changeable as far as paper is concerned, so it's superficial. The fundamental existing being here is paper, whatever its color. As soon as we know that any given color is accidental to paper, we know clearly that paper is more fundamental than its color. Similarly, paper is more basic than its shape, or the sound it makes when shaken or ripped, or cut. All material beings have superficial, changing, aspects, like color. But they all have fundamental, stable, aspects, like the papering of the paper. It does its thing, whatever color it is. All stable corporeal beings exist by their substantial activity, whatever their superficial acts may be.

Once we make this distinction, we understand lots of changes that may have puzzled us before. Our car is still our car if someone steals it, and paints it a different color. The car is substantially the same, so we call it the substance. Colors, and many other things, are accidental, so we call them accidents. In all his hymns about

the Eucharist, Thomas reminds us of this fundamental difference. He shows us that the substance of the Eucharist is Jesus Christ, while the accidents are what we see that looks like bread and wine. In this poem, Thomas compares the hidden divinity of Jesus while He was alive to the hidden humanity of Jesus in the Eucharistic bread. They are accidents that veil the substance. Christ showed his divinity by doing what only God can do, like forgive sins. Thus the substance shone through the human accidents. Similarly, Jesus shows through the accidents of bread and wine by nourishing us, so that we grow in Christ. This is what Thomas focused on: the existence behind the accidents; the activity behind the appearances.

The Eucharist is the sacrament of sacraments because it delivers Jesus, who is the Sacrament of God, or the visible manifestation of the inner substance. Jesus was visible in His human nature, but He was the invisible Son of God, or Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. So His human nature was the visible sign of the invisible activity that was the real message. That's why Jesus said "Whoever sees me sees the Father". As the sacrament, or sensory conveying of the spiritual reality of God, Jesus is the principle sacrament that God gives us. We then use seven sacraments to wend our way to God. Baptism starts this process by freeing us from Original Sin and domination by Satan, into Christ-life. Confession (penance) frees us from personal sins, so that we can grow in Christ. Marriage provides additional graces required for expanding love to a spouse and to children, who are love-gifts from God. Ordination passes on the Apostolic power of priesthood to some men. Extreme Unction prepares us for the difficult passage from temporal life through death to everlasting life. Eucharist is the sacrament that gives us Jesus as inspiration, nourishment, and lover, so that we can achieve all the goals that the other sacraments initiate.

Thomas saw this so clearly that he understood that the priest is the one who acts in the place of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave us the sacraments originally, so that the priest can pass them on to us. The priest brings the Eucharist to us by reenacting Christ's main activity at the Last Supper. The priest says Mass, so that we can do this in memory of Jesus. There is nothing more worthy of a human to do than to carry on Christ's work as a priest. Those of us who are not priests can support and encourage those who are, so that they can be as serviceable to God's people as St. Thomas was. It's worth repeating what he said when receiving the Eucharist on his deathbed: "I am receiving you, Price of my soul's redemption. All my studies, my vigils, and my labors have been for love of you. I have taught much and written much of the most sacred body of Jesus Christ. I have taught and written in the faith of Jesus Christ and of the holy Roman Church, to whose judgment I offer and submit everything."