

“Do Not Ask the Light, but the Fire”

Opening Meditation of the Plenary Session of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

27 January 2027

Recently, while in prayer, I have felt a strong call to intellectual humility, recalling those ancient words: “*ubi humilitas, ibi sapientia*” (“where there is humility, there is wisdom”). So, I would like to begin our meeting, in this context of prayer, with an invitation to intellectual humility.

God has given human beings the capacity for thought, a capacity with universal scope: one can think about the world, about history, and about our origins; one can even think about God. However, this universal capacity for thought does not mean that humans possess the capacity for exhaustive knowledge or a comprehensive perception of reality. Even with the help of the most powerful technologies imaginable, it is impossible for a human mind to be aware of reality in its totality and in every one of its aspects. This is possible only for God.

The problem is that, for this reason, we cannot have a complete understanding of even a small part of this world, since that same part can be understood fully only in the light of the totality in which it is integrated, for everything is connected.

Consequently, we are incapable of interpreting all the meanings and nuances of a reality, a person, a historical moment, or a truth.

Thomas Aquinas explained that the inexhaustible richness of God is expressed better in the richness of the whole, whose variety comes “from the intention of the first agent,” in such a way that “what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another.” If, instead, there were just one creature—even if it were supremely perfect—this would be a loss because the goodness of God “could not be represented fittingly by any one creature” (*ST* I, q. 47, a. 1; a. 2, ad 1; a. 3). For this very reason, Pope Francis explains, “we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships. We understand better the importance and meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God’s plan” (*Laudato Si*, par. 86).

Saint John of the Cross expressed this idea in other words when he exclaimed:

“[Let us enter] into the thicket of your splendid works [...] whose multitude and variety are such that we can use the term ‘thicket.’ In these works and judgments, there is abundant wisdom, so full of mysteries, [...] so deep and immense that no matter how much the soul knows, she can always enter it further; it is vast and its riches incomprehensible” (*Spiritual Cantic* 36.10).

The more science and technology advance, the more we must keep alive the awareness of our limits and our need for God, so as not to fall into a terrible deception—indeed, the very same one that led to the excesses of the Inquisition, the world wars, the *Shoah*, and the massacres in Gaza: all of which rely on fallacious arguments for their justification.

The problem is that the same can happen in each of our lives. In fact, we repeat that deception by living too securely in what we think we know.

This calls us to recognize two things:

1. That in order to understand anything fully, we must allow ourselves to be illuminated by God. We must invoke him, pray and listen to him, and let ourselves be guided by him amidst the shadows. Faith assures us that we can truly do this and that God can truly enlighten us so that we might see more clearly. We trust in him (*credere Deo*).
2. That we must reflect, think, and analyze reality, but while also listening to others, welcoming their perspectives—which allows us to perceive other aspects of that same reality—and opening ourselves to other points of view. For this reason, it benefits us to pay attention to the “peripheries,” where things are seen differently.

Along these lines, Pope Leo XIV recently affirmed that “no one possesses the whole truth; we must all humbly seek it and seek it together.” Consequently, he proposed “a Church that does not close in on itself, but remains attentive to God so that it can similarly listen to everyone” (*Homily for the Mass of the Jubilee of the Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies*, 26 October 2025).

Naturally, this applies all the more to the truths of the faith. Today, a theologian normally possesses knowledge limited to a single theological discipline or an isolated topic, whereas the mysteries of faith are interwoven in a rich hierarchy, in which the whole is especially illuminated by those central truths that constitute the heart of the Gospel.

Certainly, in a place such as this, where we have the possibility of giving authoritative answers, of writing documents that become part of the Ordinary Magisterium, and even of correcting and condemning, the risk of losing the breath of our perspective is greater. But the issue is even more serious since today, on any blog, anyone—even without having

studied much theology—can express his or her opinion and condemn others as if speaking *ex cathedra*. That is why we must recover, throughout the whole Church, that healthy realism proposed by the Church’s great sages and mystics.

What has been said about the limits of our mind applies to the whole of reality, both natural and supernatural, but above all to the profound depths of God. Therefore, I would like to conclude with a few words from Saint Bonaventure.

In the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Bonaventure asked to whom we should address the great questions of life. He then answered, “not [to] the light but [to] the fire that enflames all things and carries them away [...]. This fire is God, and his furnace is in Jerusalem; and Christ enkindles it in the heat of his burning passion” (*Itin.* VII, 6).

And at the end of his study on the knowledge of Christ, Bonaventure maintained that, on this path, “negations are more appropriate than affirmations, and superlatives more appropriate than positive predications. And if it is to be experienced, interior silence is more helpful than external speech. Therefore, let us stop speaking, and let us pray to the Lord that we may be granted the experience of that about which we have spoken” (*De scientia Christi* VII, ad ob. 21).

So, I would like to invite us to do exactly this. Let us ask for this gift in a moment of silence.

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