TASTE Reflection Questions #18
February 21, 2019

How to Define Truth
(Based on writings of Thomas Aquinas)

Fr. Scott Holmer

www.tasteprogram.com

1. What did you find most interesting from Father Scott Holmer's talk?

2. Where can truth be found? (Either from back page or Father's talk). Explain two of them.

3. Who is the only being who can say "I think therefore I am?" Why is that relevant?

4. Some people say "You have your truth and I have my truth"
   — What is a simple way to refute this idea?
   — What will be the long term result if it is not challenged?

"Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth - in a word, to know himself - so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves."

— Pope John Paul II From Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason

Where is Truth? By Kevin Aldrich

Adapted from http://www.catholicstand.com/where-is-truth/

Where is truth to be found? Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft sums up the greatest Catholic thinker, Thomas Aquinas, on this question. According to Kreeft, Thomas says truth is found in three places.

TRUTH IN GOD'S MIND — Truth exists first "in God's mind as the measure and design of things." A designer of kitchen gadgets can draw up a plan for a new potato peeler. He can then make it according to his plan. In addition, he can then judge his creation according to what he had in mind for it. However, human beings make nothing from scratch. Instead, we select and rearrange existing materials. Michelangelo got the use of a colossal block of marble no one else could do anything with and then removed enough of it to form the statue of David. Human creativity provides an analogy to how truth exists in God's mind. In His divine intellect, God conceives a plan to make something and then creates. The truth of things exists first and always in the mind of God, who, if He wishes them to exist, gives them their being.

TRUTH IN THINGS MADE — Truth exists "in things measured by and conforming to the divine mind." Edward Feser advises us "to think of 'true' in the sense of 'real' or 'genuine.' A thing is true to the extent that it conforms to the ideal defined by the essence of the kind of being it belongs to." Feser suggests we compare a triangle drawn on paper with a pen and ruler with one drawn on the cracked plastic seat of a moving school bus. The former will be a more true triangle because it conforms more closely to the nature of a triangle. Janet Smith sheds further light on things being true, or real, or genuine to the extent that they are in conformity with the ideal in God's mind. She writes (beginning by quoting St. Thomas), *"natural things are said to be true in so far as they express the likeness of the species that are in the divine mind". Every thing that exists in the world is said to be a "word" of God; it is an "expression" of what is in the divine mind.*

TRUTH IN OUR HEADS — Truth can be found is "in the human mind as measured by and conforming to things." This kind of truth is the one most familiar to us. It is the conformity of the human intellect with the thing. If you say the flag is red, white, and blue, and I say it is green, white, and blue, we must measure our judgments of the flag's colors against the actual flag. Our minds can be places in which the truth is not, either because we are ignorant or because we are in error or because we lie. Janet Smith goes on, *When we are thinking about reality, we are forming concepts in our minds of the "speech" that God has uttered. We need to conform our concepts as truly as we can to those realities that God has spoken. So when we speak, we are attempting to reproduce the concepts that initiated in God's mind and were produced in the world. Our speech must be true to God's "speech". We should have in our minds the truth that God "spoke" and speak only that truth.* So truth can be lacking in a human being when he judges something is true when it is not or when he thinks something is not the case when it is. But truth can also be lacking when one knows the truth, but does not speak it.

WISHFUL TRUTH — There is another and unfortunately quite common way in which truth does not make it into our minds. That is when we deceive ourselves. This happens when we really want something to be the case, whether it is or not. We tell ourselves things like this: "I know my boyfriend loves me" (because I cannot bear to think his cheating means he does not).

GLORIOUS TRUTH — We can give glory to God because we have minds that can know the truth about creatures and about God. We can give glory to God because of the glorious things He has made. We can give glory to God because He is the glorious maker of all that is.