

Sermon on the Feast of Saint Nicholas¹

St. Thomas Aquinas

*I have discovered David my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him;
my hand will help him, and my arm will strengthen him (Ps. 88:21-22).*²

The wonders of God are inscrutable to man, hence Job (5:9): *He does wondrous things and unsearchable*. Among these are the wonders God accomplishes in His saints, about which Augustine says: It is a greater thing to justify man than to create him,³ since creation passes away but justification endures. Hence, *God is wonderful in His saints* (Ps. 67:36).⁴ We are not able to scrutinize these wonders that God accomplishes in His saints unless He who searches the mind and heart should instruct us.⁵ Let us, therefore, hasten back to Him through prayer and ask Him at the outset to grant me something to say, etc.⁶

I have discovered David my servant, etc. From these words we are able to learn four commendable things about this holy bishop: first, his wondrous election; second, his singular consecration; third, his effective execution of office; and fourth, his unshakable and steadfast stability.⁷ His wondrous election is pointed out in these words: *I have discovered David my servant*; his particular consecration is pointed out in these words: *with my holy oil I have anointed him*; his effective execution of office is pointed out in these words: *for my hand shall help him*; and his abiding steadfastness is pointed out in these words: *and my arm shall strengthen him*.

[His wondrous election]

Let us then look at what it [the text] says: *I have discovered David my servant*, and here we can consider four ways of understanding a discovery. A discovery implies rarity, investigation, disclosure, and conviction from experience.⁸

First, I say that a discovery implies rarity, because rare things are said to be discovered. It would be laughable to say: "I discovered people on the Little Bridge."⁹ But what is rare is said to be discovered, as we see in Proverbs (31:10) where it is asked: *Who shall discover a strong woman?* as if to say, only with difficulty is a strong woman to be found because a woman is naturally delicate and frail.

Secondly, things sought for are said to be discovered, as it says in Proverbs (2:4): *If you will seek for it as [other men seek for] money, you will find it*, namely divine knowledge.¹⁰ Moreover, the Gospel speaks about a woman searching for a lost coin, *until she finds it* (Lk. 15:8).

Thirdly, a discovery implies disclosure, as we read in the Gospel: *The kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household searching for a treasure hidden in a field; when he finds it, he goes and sells all that he has*, etc. (Mt. 13:44). When a treasure is brought forth from the earth and shown to others, then it is said to have been discovered.

Fourthly, a discovery implies conviction from experience. When a person doubts something and afterwards comes to know it with certainty, he declares: "I have discovered this to be so." And in just this way Solomon declares: *I have discovered that a woman is more bitter than death* (Eccles. 7:22).¹¹

The Lord *discovered* blessed Nicholas in these ways.

First, He discovered in him something very rare, namely, virtue in the prime of his youth, which is rare among youths¹²; hence it says in Proverbs: *Youth and pleasure are vain*.¹³ This is a *rara avis*,¹⁴ namely, that as a youth he was not subject to vanity; and because blessed Nicholas preserved his holiness from childhood, he is said to have been *discovered*. For he himself "while still a little boy used to afflict his body with much fasting."¹⁵ Also the saying in Hosea (9:10) [comes to mind]: *I discovered Israel like grapes in the desert, I discovered the sons of Israel as first fruits of the fig tree*.¹⁶ The fig ripens later than other fruits, but if it ripens in prime season it is said to be "discovered."¹⁷ Likewise, children who preserve their holiness from childhood are called the first fruits of a fig tree and are said to be discovered, and this is pleasing to God; thus in Micah [we read] (7:1): *My soul desired the first ripe figs*.¹⁸ Fish and fruit in season are very much desired; so, too, very desirable to God is the man who carries the Lord's yoke from his youth, as is said in Lamentations (3:27): *It will be good for a man, when he has borne the Lord's yoke from his youth*,¹⁹ because *a young man shall walk according to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it* (Prov. 22:6).²⁰ At the same time, if such as these should depart from the path of holiness, they return to it more easily.²¹

Secondly, the Lord discovers in blessed Nicholas what He seeks. And what does the Lord seek? Surely, He seeks a faithful soul,²² hence [we read] in John (4:24): *God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*. And why does God seek out the man with a faithful soul? I say: whoever takes delight in dwelling with another person seeks out that person. So it is with God, because it gives Him delight to dwell with a faithful soul. Hence He says: *My delights are to be with the children of men* (Prov. 8:31).²³ And God discovered in blessed Nicholas a faithful soul, because he was frequently in church, faithfully at his prayers²⁴; so, what is said in Hosea (12:4) is suitably said of him: *He wept and made supplication to Him, and He discovered him in Bethel*.²⁵ Bethel means "the house of God."²⁶ Notice how rightly it is said that *He discovered David*, for David possessed great virtues from his youth: he slew a bear and a lion,²⁷ he was preferred over all his brothers,²⁸ and he was also most devout. The Psalmist says: *As with the marrow and fat*, that is, of devotion,²⁹ *let my*

soul be filled (Ps. 62:6)³⁰; and Sirach (47:1): *As the fat taken away from the flesh*, thus was David separated *from among the children of Israel*.³¹ And blessed Nicholas was eminently holy.

Thirdly, the Lord discovered in blessed Nicholas something outstanding,³² namely a pious affection. What makes a person stand out? I say that nothing makes a person so outstanding as piety and a ready will to do good for others.³³ God is hidden in Himself, yet He is revealed to us through the benefits He grants. So, in Sirach it is said about those who show pity toward others³⁴: *These were men of mercy, whose pious deeds have not failed* (44:10), and *the church declares their praise* (44:15).³⁵ And in another place it says: *The lips of many will praise him who gives freely of his bread* (Sir. 31:28).³⁶ Blessed Nicholas was especially "sympathizing with and showing pity from his heart toward the afflicted,"³⁷ and indeed having given them gold, he relieved the poverty of virgins.³⁸ Thus, what Hosea (14:9) says can be applied to him: *From me is his fruit discovered*.³⁹ And this is why the Lord says rightly: *I discovered David, my servant*. A servant is one who carries out his lord's work; and the principal work of the Lord is mercy, as the Psalmist says: *And His tender mercies are over all His works* (Ps. 144:9).⁴⁰ Therefore, the Lord's servant is the one who exercises mercy toward the poor. As the Apostle says: *We are servants for Jesus' sake* (2 Cor. 4:5).

Fourthly, the Lord discovered in blessed Nicholas something tested by experience, namely faithfulness,⁴¹ which is greatly sought after; thus the Apostle says: *Now what is sought after in stewards, except that a man be found faithful?* (1 Cor. 4:2); and the Book of Wisdom (3:5) says: *He tested them, and found them worthy of Himself*. A faithful man must be a servant, so that he refers all that is his to God.⁴² You pray, you perform works of mercy, whatever kind of good you do, it is necessary that you should refer it to God. Hence it is said: *He has been tested in this, and was found perfect* (Sir. 31:10).⁴³ Blessed Nicholas is such a man, and for that reason he is called *my servant* (Ps. 88:21). Many people, on the other hand, do not serve the Lord but themselves; as the Apostle puts it: *They that are such serve not Christ but their own belly* (Rom. 16:18). If you are doing good in order to get prebends,⁴⁴ you are serving yourself, not God.

A good bishop ought not to be like these sorts of people, but rather he ought to be upright [*innocens*] in his own person, devout before God, merciful to his neighbor, faithful in all things in respect to everyone.

[His singular consecration]

We move on now to his consecration, which is indicated by these words: *with my holy oil I have anointed him* (Ps. 88:21). It should be noted that the consecration⁴⁵ of bishops and of certain others is done with oil; there is hardly any consecration for which we do not use oil. To show the power of oil, note that we use it for four reasons: namely, to heal a wound, to fuel

light, to give flavor to food, and to soften.[46](#)

First, I say that we use oil to heal. Thus in Isaiah we read (1:6): *Bruises and sores and bleeding wounds are not bound up, nor dressed nor softened with oil.*

Secondly, we use oil to fuel light, hence in Exodus (25:6) a precept was given to the sons of Israel that they offer *oil for making ready the lamps*.[47](#)

Thirdly, we use oil to give flavor to food,[48](#) therefore we read that King Solomon sent Hiram oil as food.[49](#)

Fourthly, we use oil to soften, thus it is said: *His words are smoother than oil* (Ps. 54:22).[50](#)

First, I say that we use oil to heal a wound, through which [image] we understand healing grace. Thus we read in Luke (10:34) that the Samaritan who wanted to take care of a wounded man poured [on his wounds] *wine and oil*. The sick are anointed with oil, as James [instructs] (5:14): *Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the presbyters of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil*.[51](#) And since blessed Nicholas was anointed with the oil of healing grace, because he had full soundness of [spiritual] health and was equipped to anoint others, we are told that *wine and oil* were poured -- that is to say, the wine of stern correction and the oil of mercy and comfort.

Secondly, we use oil to prepare lamps, and this signifies the studious quest for wisdom.[52](#) It is said about this oil: *Let not oil be lacking from your head* (Eccles. 9:8), and in Zechariah (4:14): *These are two sons of glistening oil*.[53](#) Since oil functions as fuel for light, therefore the prophets were anointed with oil.[54](#)

Thirdly, we use oil to give flavor to food, and this signifies spiritual joy. Just as seasonings make food tasty,[55](#) so also spiritual joy makes good works easy. When we are sad, even a small task seems difficult; but when we are joyful, even a difficult task seems easy. So, we find in the Psalms: *That He may make your face cheerful with oil* (Ps. 103:15).[56](#) *God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions* (Ps. 44:8).[57](#) And in Isaiah (61:3): *The oil of joy, in place of mourning*.[58](#) Therefore priests are anointed with oil, that is to say with the oil of gladness. From all this we see that spiritual gladness belongs to those who are surrendered over to divine worship[59](#); *Let your priests be clothed with joy*, etc. (Ps. 131:9)
[60](#)

Fourthly, we use oil to soften, and this signifies mercy and kindness of heart, both of which blessed Nicholas possessed, since he was utterly filled with mercy and devotion.[61](#) It is said in Deuteronomy (33:24): *Let him be pleasing to his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil*. Oil is

diffusive of itself; mercy is the same way.⁶² Just as oil spreads over things, mercy spreads over every good work.⁶³ Therefore, unless you have mercy, your labors are nothing; hence the Apostle says: *Pity avails for everything* (1 Tim. 4:8).⁶⁴ You ought to consider that in the future, according to the merits of graces the evidence of rewards will appear in the glorified bodies of the saints, and that even in this life the signs of their affection appear [in their earthly bodies].⁶⁵ This is evident in the case of blessed Francis, where the signs of the passion of Christ became visible, so vehemently was he affected by the passion of Christ.⁶⁶ In blessed Nicholas's case, signs of mercy appeared when "his tomb sweated oil,"⁶⁷ thus indicating that he was a man of great mercy. In Deuteronomy (32:13) we find: *So that he might suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the hardest stone.* This pertains to a king.⁶⁸

[His effective execution of office]

Next comes the way in which he carried out his office, when it says: *My hand shall help him* (Ps. 88:22), etc. God does not have a bodily hand, but His strength is called His hand. Now see the four ways by which the hand of God helped Nicholas: by drawing him to Himself and snatching him from evil; by guiding him; by strengthening him⁶⁹; and by working miracles through him.

First, I say: the hand of the Lord, that is to say His strength, helped blessed Nicholas by drawing him to Himself and delivering him from evil. We read in the Psalms: *Stretch forth your hand from on high, rescue me and deliver me from the many waters and from the hand of strange children* (Ps.143:7).⁷⁰

Secondly, the hand of God helped blessed Nicholas by guiding him. Just as we normally use our hands to guide others, so the Lord uses His power to guide the just. Again the Psalmist says: *The wickedness of sinners will be brought to an end, but the Lord will guide the just* (Ps. 7:10).⁷¹ Isaiah (8:11) speaks in a similar way: *He has taught me by His strong hand, that I should not walk in the way of this people.*⁷²

Thirdly, the hand of the Lord, that is to say His power, helped blessed Nicholas by giving him strength, hence in Ezekiel (3:14): *And the hand of the Lord was with me to strengthen me.*⁷³ And he was greatly strengthened.⁷⁴

Fourthly, the hand of the Lord, that is to say His power, helped blessed Nicholas by working miracles⁷⁵ through him, hence in Acts (4:30): *You will stretch out your hand [to heal], and signs and wonders are performed in the name of your Son.*⁷⁶ Blessed Nicholas was filled with the power to work miracles.⁷⁷ Who is there that has ever sought the glory of the world and obtained it as did blessed Nicholas, who was but a poor bishop in Greece? The Lord adorned him with miracles because he showed the greatest mercy. *Know that the Lord has made His holy one wonderful* (Ps. 4:4).⁷⁸ It was mercy that made blessed Nicholas an extraordinary

man, and the Lord [Jesus Christ] strengthened him even unto everlasting life. May He lead us there, who lives [and reigns] with the Father and the Holy Spirit, [God, for ever and ever, Amen.][79](#)

Endnotes

1. Translated by Athanasius Sulavik, op, from the provisional critical edition of the Leonine Commission. The translator is thankful to Louis-Jacques Bataillon, op, for providing this text. All of the references to Thomas's sources, and most of the references to *loci paralleli*, are the work of Fr. Bataillon; remaining notes are the work of A. Sulavik and P. Kwasniewski. Thomas's quotations of Scripture are translated directly from his own words; chapter and verse are those of the Vulgate. Where modern editions differ in the numbering of chapter and verse, or where the RSV translation is importantly different, this will be noted for the sake of comparison. Thomas refers to the book after Wisdom as Ecclesiasticus; to avoid confusion with Ecclesiastes (Eccles.), we have substituted 'Sirach' ('Sir.') for 'Ecclesiasticus'. In Fr. Bataillon's judgment this sermon is most likely to have been preached in Paris on the sixth of December in 1269, 1270, or 1271. [\(return to text\)](#)
2. Ps. 89:20-21 (RSV): "I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him; so that my hand shall ever abide with him, my arm also shall strengthen him." For a different application of these verses, cf. Thomas's prologue to his *Commentary on Ephesians*: "*Confirmavi* ne a fide vacillarent, sicut artifex confirmat aedificium, ne cadat. Unde dictum est Petro Lc. xxii, 32: «Et tu aliquando conversus confirma fratres tuos,» quod fecit Paulus. Unde ei competit illud Iob iv, 4: «Vacillantes confirmaverunt sermones tui.» Confirmavit item ne pseudo timerent, sicut episcopus confirmat puerum ad robur contra pusillanimitatem, unde dictum est de David in Ps. lxxxviii, 21: «Inveni David servum meum, oleo sancto meo unxi eum; manus enim mea auxiliabitur ei, et brachium meum confortabit eum, nihil proficiet inimicus in eo,» etc." [\(return to text\)](#)
3. Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannem*, tr. 72.13 on Jn. 14:12 (CCSL 36:508.1-4, 509.14-15; PL 35:1823): "Iudicat qui potest, utrum maius sit iustos creare quam impios iustificare." Cf. *Catena aurea in Ioh.* 14:12. St. Thomas often mentions this truth in the form of the phrase "maius est iustificare impium quam creare mundum (*uel* celum et terram)": cf. *Sent.* I, d. 5, q. 1, a. 2, sc. 2; *De veritate* q. 27, a. 3, sc. 4; *De potentia* q. 3, a. 4, obj. 8); *ST* I-II, q. 113, a. 9; *ST* III, q. 43, a. 4, ad 2. [\(return to text\)](#)
4. Cp. Ps. 68:35 (RSV): "Terrible is God in his sanctuary. . ." [\(return to text\)](#)
5. *cordium et renum*. Cf. Ps. 7:10; Jer. 17:10; Rev. 2:23. [\(return to text\)](#)

6. As was customary in medieval writing, phrases whose natural completion would have been evident to the speaker or reader are often replaced with a curt "etc."; the same can be seen at the end of this sermon, where a traditional doxology is expected. [\(return to text\)](#)
7. This fourfold division of Ps. 88:21-22 structures the remainder of the sermon. St. Thomas omits to discuss the fourth division, viz., the "abiding steadfastness" signified by "my arm shall strengthen him"; for three possible explanations of this omission, see P. Kwasniewski, "Two Wonderworkers," note 49. [\(return to text\)](#)
8. *raritatem, inquisitionem, apparitionem et experimentalem probationem* [\(return to text\)](#)
9. A clear reference to the Little Bridge, located upon the Seine River in Paris, upon which classes were taught at the University of Paris. Thomas's reference to it establishes both the audience and place of this sermon, namely clerical students at Paris. [\(return to text\)](#)
10. Prov. 2:4-5 (RSV): "[I]f you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." [\(return to text\)](#)
11. Eccles. 7:26 (RSV): "I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters; he who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her." [\(return to text\)](#)
12. *scilicet tempestiuam uirtutem que rara est in iuuenibus*. "Tempestivam" carries the note, first, of seasonable, opportune, timely; it then comes to have the sense of in one's prime, ripe, ready, mature. It can at times mean early. [\(return to text\)](#)
13. In fact, Eccles. 11:10 (RSV): "Remove vexation from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity." [\(return to text\)](#)
14. *rara avis*: cf. Persius, *Sat.* 146; Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.165; cf. also Horace, *Sat.* II.2.26. [\(return to text\)](#)
15. *Adhuc . . . corpus*: cf. *Officium S. Nicolai*, First Antiphon at Lauds. Rome, Santa Sabina, AGOP XIV-L-1, f. 275va. [\(return to text\)](#)
16. The Vulgate reads: "I have found Israel like grapes in the desert, I saw their fathers like the firstfruits of the figtree in the top thereof. . ." [\(return to text\)](#)
17. The point again seems to be that if one were to find fruits on a fruit tree before the usual season for it, one would go to one's companions with surprise and say: "I discovered fruit on

that tree!" Later, when the fruits are expected, it would be strange to say that one had *discovered* them; it's common knowledge, the fruits are plain to see. [\(return to text\)](#)

18. Mic. 7:1 (RSV): "Woe is me! For I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the vintage has been gleaned: there is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig which my soul desires." [\(return to text\)](#)

19. Lam. 3:27 (RSV): "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." [\(return to text\)](#)

20. Prov. 22:6 (RSV): "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." [\(return to text\)](#)

21. Here, we find an example where Thomas's preaching is influenced by his biblical exegesis. He appropriates the same insight he made as a *cursor biblicus* in his *Postill* (commentary) on *Lamentations* iii, where he says, "Hic ostendit divinam misericordiam ex expectatione futurorum . . . bonum est viro cum portaverit jugum, timoris domini et amoris, ab adolescentia, ut fervens aetas deprimatur, et facilius ad bona assuescat. Prov. 22: adolescens juxta viam suam, etiam cum senuerit, non recedet ab ea." On the relationship between Aquinas's preaching and biblical exegesis, see L.-J. Bataillon, op, "Les sermons de saint Thomas et la *Catena aurea*," in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974, Commemorative Studies*, ed. A. Maurer et al. Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974, 1:67-75. [\(return to text\)](#)

22. *mentem deuotam*, and slightly below, *cum mente deuota*, etc. [\(return to text\)](#)

23. Cp. Prov. 8:30b-31 (RSV): "I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world, and delighting in the sons of men." [\(return to text\)](#)

24. *assiduus fuit in ecclesia et deuota oratione* [\(return to text\)](#)

25. Cp. Hos. 12:4 (RSV): "He strove with the angel and prevailed, he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with him. . ." [\(return to text\)](#)

26. Jerome, *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum*, Gen. B (CCSL 72:62, line 18; PL 23:775-76). [\(return to text\)](#)

27. Cf. 1 Kings 17:36 (Vulg.) or 1 Sam. 17:37 (RSV): "And David said, 'The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.'" [\(return to text\)](#)

28. Cf. 1 Kings 16 (Vulg.) or 1 Sam. 16, esp. verse 13a (RSV): "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon

David from that day forward." [\(return to text\)](#)

29. Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 2, arg. 2: "devotio vero per pinguedinem"; *ibid.*, ad 2. [\(return to text\)](#)

30. Cp. Ps. 63:5 (RSV): "My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips. . ." [\(return to text\)](#)

31. Sir. 47:2 (RSV): "As the fat is selected from the peace offering, so David was selected from the sons of Israel." [\(return to text\)](#)

32. *apparens*, and in the next sentence, *apparere* [\(return to text\)](#)

33. *nichil reddit hominem ita clarum sicut pietas et benignitas ad alios* [\(return to text\)](#)

34. *pietatem exercent ad alios*. See note 64. [\(return to text\)](#)

35. Sir. 44:10, 15 (RSV): "But these were men of mercy, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten . . . Peoples will declare their wisdom, and the congregation proclaims their praise." [\(return to text\)](#)

36. Sir. 31:23 (RSV): "Men will praise the one who is liberal with food. . ." [\(return to text\)](#)

37. *compatiens et super afflictos pia gestans uiscera*: *Officium S. Nicolai*, First Responsory at Matins. Roma, Santa Sabina, AGOP XIV-L-1, f. 274va. [\(return to text\)](#)

38. Cf. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*. Trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, 1:21-22. [\(return to text\)](#)

39. Cp. Hos. 14:8b (RSV): "I am like an evergreen cypress, from me comes your fruit." [\(return to text\)](#)

40. Cp. Ps. 145:9 (RSV): "The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made." [\(return to text\)](#)

41. *aliquid experimentaliter probatum, scilicet fidelitatem* [\(return to text\)](#)

42. or "offers everything of his own back to God": *Fidelis debet esse seruus ut omnia sua in Deum referat*. [\(return to text\)](#)

43. The full context: "Blessed is the rich man who is found blameless, and who does not go after gold. Who is he? And we will call him blessed, for he has done wonderful things among his people. Who has been tested by it and been found perfect? Let it be for him a ground for boasting. Who has had the power to transgress, and did not transgress, and to do evil and did not do it? His prosperity will be established, and the assembly will relate his acts of charity" (Sir. 31:8-11, RSV). [\(return to text\)](#)

44. Thomas was openly critical of the clerical abuses of his own day. One of the more reprehensible abuses involved certain clerics enrolled at the University of Paris who accepted one or more prebends or ecclesiastical benefices without providing pastoral care to their churches, enabling them to remain in studies for great lengths of time. See also *Quodlibet* V, q. 11, a. 3; *Quodlibet* I, q. 7, a. 1; *Quodlibet* VI, q. 5, aa. 2-4. [\(return to text\)](#)

45. In this sentence, *sanctificatio*; in the preceding sentence, *consecratio*. [\(return to text\)](#)

46. St. Thomas encountered these four reasons in a definition from Papias Vocabulista transcribed by William Brito in the *Summa Britonis*. "To kindle light" renders *ad fomentum luminis*; "to give flavor to food" renders *ad condimentum saporis*. [\(return to text\)](#)

47. Cf. also Ex. 27:20: "'And you shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may be set up to burn continually.'" [\(return to text\)](#)

48. *ad condimentum cibi*. Cf. Ex. 29:2, which speaks of "unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil." [\(return to text\)](#)

49. Cf. 3 Kings 5:11 (Vulg.) or 1 Kings 5:11 (RSV): "while Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand cors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty thousand cors of beaten oil. Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year." [\(return to text\)](#)

50. Ps. 55:21 (RSV): "His speech was smoother than butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords." [\(return to text\)](#)

51. Jas. 5:14. [\(return to text\)](#)

52. *sapientie studium* [\(return to text\)](#)

53. The Vulgate reads: "These are two sons of oil." Cp. Zech. 4:14 (RSV): "Then he [the angel] said, 'These are the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.'" [\(return to text\)](#)

54. Cf. 3 Kings 19:16 (Vulg.) or 1 Kings 19:16 (RSV), the Lord speaking to Elijah: "and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of

Abelmeholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place." [\(return to text\)](#)

55. *condimenta enim reddunt cibaria sapida* [\(return to text\)](#)

56. Cf. Ps. 104:14-15 (RSV): "Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart." [\(return to text\)](#)

57. Ps. 45:7 (RSV). [\(return to text\)](#)

58. Part of the prophecy of the Messianic good tidings: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion -- to give them a garland instead of ashes, *the oil of gladness instead of mourning*, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified" (Is. 61:1-3, RSV). [\(return to text\)](#)

59. *ad illos qui sunt diuino cultui mancipati*. Cf. R. J. Deferrari, *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Boston, Daughters of St. Paul, 1986. S.v. *mancipo*: "to devote or consecrate to . . . to make subject to, enslave; to bind over, to give the right to another." [\(return to text\)](#)

60. The Vulgate reads: "sacerdotes tui induentur iustitia et sancti tui exultabunt." Cf. Ps. 132:9-10 (RSV): "Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness, and let thy saints shout for joy. For thy servant David's sake do not turn away the face of thy anointed one." [\(return to text\)](#)

61. "kindness of heart" renders *benignitas cordis*, which carries the sense of a hearty will to do good for others; "devotion" renders *pietate*, which here also carries the connotation of 'pity', which is derived from the same Latin word. Following Bede and Alcuin, St. Thomas discusses oil as a symbol of mercy in several places; cf. *Catena aurea in Ioh.* 8:1; *Lectura in Ioh.* 8:1; *Super Psalmos* 44:5; *Sermo Osanna Filio David*. [\(return to text\)](#)

62. *Oleum est sui diffusivum, similiter misericordia* -- reminiscent of the Neoplatonic axiom *bonum est diffusivum sui*. [\(return to text\)](#)

63. "spreads over": *superenatat*. [\(return to text\)](#)

64. A difficult verse to translate: *Pietas ad omnia ualet*. Older English translations rendered *pietas* with "godliness." St. Thomas often interprets the word to mean what we mean by 'pity' or 'works of mercy', e.g., "pro eleemosynarum largitione" (*Sent.* IV, d. 15, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 3, arg. 1);

"Glossa dicit, 1 Timoth., 4, super illud: «Pietas ad omnia valet»: «Omnis summa disciplinae christianae est in misericordia et pietate.» Sed in illo consistit summa rei quod est in re praecipuum. Ergo praecipuum inter alia satisfactionis opera est eleemosyna" (*Sent.* IV, d. 15, q. 2, a. 2, qa. 2, sed contra 1; the Gloss is St. Ambrose's). In *ST* II-II, q. 30, a. 4, an objection starts from 1 Tim. 4:8 and concludes that *misericordia* is the highest of all virtues. The response: "Summa religionis christianae in misericordia consistit *quantum ad exteriora opera*. Interior tamen affectio caritatis, qua coniungimur Deo, praeponderat et dilectioni et misericordiae in proximos." (Similarly, at *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 7, St. Thomas explains that when St. Paul says "*pietas* is useful in everything," he is not suggesting that *pietas* is the greatest of God's gifts, but rather contrasting it with bodily exercise, which "profits little.") In an article on the gift of counsel, Thomas expressly equates the *pietas* of 1 Tim. 4:8 with *misericordia* (*ST* II-II, q. 52, a. 4). In his own commentary on the verse, Thomas recognizes a double meaning: "Cum ergo dicit «exerce teipsum ad pietatem,» potest accipi secundum quod pertinet ad cultum Dei, et ad opera misericordiae exhibenda. Glossa: «ad pietatem, id est, ad cultum omnipotentis Dei, et opera misericordiae»" (*Super I Tim.* cap. 4, lec. 2). ([return to text](#))

65. "evidence" and "signs" translate *indicia*. Thomas's assertion may be phrased: After the resurrection, the bodies of the saints will bear indications of the good works they have done owing to the grace of God, and even now, in this world, the great love of some saints is given a bodily expression (the example of the stigmata implying that such an expression, too, like the charity it symbolizes, is a gift from God, and not the result of natural causes). ([return to text](#))

66. The Latin reads *sicut patet quod in beato Francisco fuerunt indicia passionis Christi quia uehementer afficiebatur circa passionem Christi*. If one were to render the *quia* "because," it would sound like an assertion of efficient causality, as if to say: it was the intensity of St. Francis's affections that caused the signs to appear, his immense charity and inner likeness to the Crucified spilling over, as it were, into his body so that body could mirror soul. Clearly Thomas is asserting *some* causal connection, which I believe is this: it was *due* to Francis being the sort of saint he was that God fittingly bestowed this gratuitous grace on him -- bearing in mind, of course, that he owed his sanctity as well as its mode or "mission" also primarily to God's grace. On this interesting reference to St. Francis, see cf. L.-J. Bataillon, op, "Les stigmates de Saint François vus par Thomas d'Aquin et quelques autres prédicateurs Dominicains," in: *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 90 (1997), 341-47. ([return to text](#))

67. *Officium S. Nicolai*, Ninth Responsory at Matins. Rome, Santa Sabina. AGOP XIV-L-1, f. 275rb. ([return to text](#))

68. What Thomas means by this brief statement is a bit obscure. Perhaps he is saying that the noble words applied to the people of Israel in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:8-14) are fitting for a kingly people or a kingly person; or he may be saying that only a great king could be so strong and wise as to "suck honey out of the rock and oil from hardest stone." Thus, so great was the mercy of St. Nicholas that he was a king in the Lord's spiritual kingdom, as verified in

the miraculous flowing of oil from hardest stone. [\(return to text\)](#)

69. *ipsum confortando* could also be rendered "by comforting him." [\(return to text\)](#)

70. Ps. 144:7 (RSV). [\(return to text\)](#)

71. Cp. Ps. 7:9 (RSV): "O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish thou the righteous, thou who triest the minds and hearts, thou righteous God." [\(return to text\)](#)

72. Cp. Is. 8:11 (RSV): "For the Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people . . ." [\(return to text\)](#)

73. Cp. Ez. 3:14 (RSV): "The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me. . ." [\(return to text\)](#)

74. *bene confortatus* [\(return to text\)](#)

75. In a translation of this paragraph, it is impossible to convey the subtle interplay of "wonder" words: the Lord works miracles (*miracula*) through Nicholas, who was full of [the power of] the miraculous (*plenus miraculis*); the Psalmist says "Know that the Lord has made wonderful [*mirificauit*] his saint"; "it was mercy that made Nicholas an extraordinary man [*mirabilem*]." The "signs and wonders" of Acts 4:30 is *signa et prodigia*. [\(return to text\)](#)

76. Acts 4:29-30 (RSV): "And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant [or: child] Jesus." [\(return to text\)](#)

77. *Beatus Nicholaus plenus fuit miraculis* [\(return to text\)](#)

78. Cp. Ps. 4:3 (RSV): "But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself. . ." [\(return to text\)](#)

79. In place of the bracketed phrases the text has "etc." (see note 6). For Fr. Bataillon's three possible explanations of the sermon's abrupt ending and its lack of the fourth part of the exposition announced near the beginning ("and his abiding steadfastness is pointed out in these words: *and my arm shall strengthen him*"), see P. Kwasniewski, "Two Wonderworkers," note 49. [\(return to text\)](#)

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