“I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one speaking with you.”

Third Sunday of Lent

March 15, 2020

Saint Francis of Assisi Parish
Missions of Our Lady of the Valley in Fall River Mills
and Saint Stephen’s in Bieber
Mission Statement

We, the Catholic Church of Saint Francis, are a community of faith called by Baptism to center our lives in the sacraments and the Holy Eucharist. We gather together to mutually grow in our love for God and neighbor by studying the Word of God; by believing in the Faith and Traditions from the Apostles; by accepting the teachings of the Magisterium and by receiving and giving support, hope, faith and charity.

Parroquia de San Francisco de Asís
Misiones de Nuestra Señora del Valle en Fall River Mills
y San Esteban en Bieber
Nuestra Misión

Nosotros la Iglesia de San Francisco, somos una comunidad de Fe llamados por el Bautismo a centrar nuestra vida en los sacramentos y la Santa Eucaristía. Nosotros nos reunimos para crecer mutuamente en nuestro amor a Dios y a nuestro semejante a través de estudiar la Palabra de Dios; a través de creer en la Fe y Tradición de los Apóstoles; a través de aceptar las enseñanzas del Magisterio y a través de recibir y dar Apoyo, Fe, Esperanza y Caridad.
Rev. Apolonio C. Catada
Parochial Administrator
St. Francis of Assisi Parish
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MISSIONS
Our Lady of the Valley St. Stephen’s
43434 Hwy. 299E Hwy. 299E
Fall River Mills Bieber

MASS SCHEDULE
See “Parish Calendar” (opposite) for changes.

Weekends
Saturday 4:30 pm Our Lady of the Valley
Sunday 9:00 am St. Francis
11:00 am Our Lady of the Valley (Spanish)
1:00 pm St. Stephen’s

Weekdays
Mon-Tue, Thu-Fri 9:00 am St. Francis
Friday 7:00 pm Our Lady of the Valley (Spanish)

ADORATION AND BENEDICTION
1st Friday 9:30 am St. Francis (until 12 pm)
1st Saturday 3:30 pm Our Lady of the Valley
1st Sunday 11:45 am St. Stephen’s

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION (CONFESSION)
Saturday (Before Mass) 4:00 pm Our Lady of the Valley
Sunday (Before Mass) 8:30 am St. Francis
Sunday (After Mass) 2:00 pm St. Stephen’s
Friday (Before Mass) 6:00 pm Our Lady of the Valley
Friday (After Mass) 8:00 pm Our Lady of the Valley

COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY
Serving the Fall River Mills Valley, food may be obtained by calling Bonnie Hawkins (336-5231).

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL FOOD BANK
Food is available on request. Call the parish at 335-2372 for food anytime you are in need or call Bob Gartner at 249-8641.

NEW PARISHIONERS
Please register by completing the form at the church entrance.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION FOR CHILDREN (CCD)
Please contact Josefa Johnston (294-5290) or Elaine Shields (336-1003) or Estella Valdivinos (524-6434) Spanish

MUSIC: WEDDINGS & FUNERALS
Please contact Joan Knap (530) 294-1234

BECOMING CATHOLIC (RCIA)
Program of study for non-Catholic adults or Catholics seeking the Sacrament of Confirmation. Contact David Wanat at 335-2941

PRAYER REQUESTS
Please contact Bob Gartner 249-8641

MINISTERS
St. Francis
March 15
March 22
Lectors: Jim Billo Sandy Ogden
Kathy Billo Carolyn Garfield
Mary Klobas Unassigned
John Klobas Sandy von Tersch
Ex. Min. of Holy Communion: Carol Garfield

CALENDAR
Tue 03/17 St. Patrick’s Day—
Co-patron of the Diocese of Sacramento
Fri 03/20 8:30 am St. Francis
6:00 pm Our Lady of
The Valley
The Valley
Sat 03/21 Our Lady of
The Valley Catholic Relief Services
Sun 03/22 All Masses Collection

Fri 03/27 8:30 am St. Francis
6:00 pm Our Lady of
The Valley Stations of the Cross
The Valley
Fri 04/03 8:30 am St. Francis
6:00 pm Our Lady of
The Valley Stations of the Cross
The Valley
Thu 04/09 Holy Thursday
Fri 04/10 All Masses Good Friday Collection
For the Holy Land
Sat 04/11 8:15 pm St. Francis Easter Vigil
Sun 04/12 Easter Sunday

Collections for 36 Weeks of Fiscal Year 2020

Source of Income This YTD Last YTD Difference
St. Francis 31,462.78 28,942.16 2,520.62
OLV English 14,523.06 13,995.65 527.41
OLV Spanish 10,833.71 12,787.12 -1,953.41
St. Stephen’s 17,755.25 18,087.66 -332.41
WeShare 5,102.80 6,967.25 -1,864.45
Parish Picnic 777.00 0.00 777.00
OL of Guadalupe 295.00 449.21 -154.21
Adjustment -155.00 45.00 -200.00
Total 80,594.60 80,765.05 -170.45

COLLECTION OF ALUMINUM AND PLASTICS
Please bring your items directly to the Burney recycling place and tell them that you want the credit to go to St. Francis Catholic Church. Thank you.

Hospitality at St. Stephen’s
Every Sunday is hospitality Sunday at St. Stephen’s. Please join us for a nice lunch with soup/casserole, salad, bread, dessert and drinks. All are welcome, bring something to share if you can.


REFLECTION

The **first reading** is taken from the Book of Exodus 17:3-7. The Israelites, the Chosen People of God, were suffering slavery and the threat of total extermination in Egypt; God miraculously set them free and, with Moses as their leader, he led them towards the promised land of Canaan. But they soon forgot what God had done for them and began to murmur and rebel because of the difficulties of the long desert journey. One of these rebellious murmurings is put before us today.

The **second reading** is from the St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans 5:1-2; 5-8. This brief section is an encouragement to all who have been given the gift of the Christian faith to persevere in spite of adversity.

The **Gospel** is from St. John 4:5-42. This gospel, about the Samaritan woman, is exceptionally rich. Every time we read it we are passionately moved by that intense conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, recalling the great teaching of Saint Augustine, with regard to Christ’s request to the woman, “give me something to drink”, said: “Yes, God thirsts for our faith and our love. As a good and merciful father, he wants our total, prosperity”. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, recalling the great teaching of Saint Augustine, with regard to Christ’s request to the woman, “give me something to drink”, said: “Yes, God thirsts for our faith and our love. As a good and merciful father, he wants our total, possible good, and this good is he himself. The Samaritan woman, on the other hand, represents the existential dissatisfaction of one who does not find what he seeks. She had "five husbands" and now she lives with another man; her going to and from the well to draw water expresses a repetitive and resigned life. However, everything changes for her that day, thanks to the conversation with the Lord Jesus “...” (Benedict XVI, Angelus homily 24 February 2008).

To recognize that if we entrust ourselves to God, we receive every “possible good” which, as the Pope reminds us, is God himself, means living the dynamic of conversion to God: renouncing a self-centered mentality, which deceives self-sufficient man, in order to receive the gift of God. Man without God is inevitably destined to dissatisfaction, limited in everything by his own limits as a creature, even in “giving himself” or “obtaining for himself” joy, love, happiness... Man without God cannot think to reach boundless joy, unlimited and eternal love, the living water of which, precisely, Jesus speaks with the Samaritan woman.

Happiness, another word for the living water, can only be given by the One who possesses it, and man does not possess it. God alone can share it with those who place their trust in Him and follow Him.

The living water, the gift of the Holy Spirit, can only be given by the Lord Jesus whom the Father sent into the world to give to all men and women eternal life, that is, never ending happiness. As the Pope reminds us “only the water that Jesus offers, the living water of the Spirit, can quench” man’s “thirst for the infinite” (Benedict XVI, homily 24 February 2008). Man is able to give his fellow humans, affection, money, power, human glory, honor, career ... but not endless happiness which, since it is an unlimited good, belongs to the divine, infinite sphere!

The living water flows only from the divine source. The Samaritan woman went to a well which was deep, but limited, whereas unlimited was her thirst for happiness and love. The woman, the Holy Father tells us, “represents the existential dissatisfaction of one who does not find what he seeks”. How often man seeks the infinite, the eternal, well-being...but sadly continues to seek it in a well, in a reality, the earthly reality, which is unable to contain it. How many wells, deep but empty, how many wells of stagnant water, we have met on our way! We carry within us immense desires and easily deceive ourselves that we can meet them.

On our path of conversion, what a great grace it is to find the Lord Jesus waiting patiently for us beside our senseless wells. When, like the Samaritan woman, we are tired of the things of this world, of almost empty wells, then the Divine Master is especially close to us. He asks us to give him something to drink, he asks us to trust Him to satiate our heart and if we trust in Him we discover the joy of finding the true well, the source of crystal clear water.

Then, as if in a dream, as it was for the Samaritan woman, everything which before was important, no longer counts, true reality is something else, it becomes that Man-God who begs to give Himself! The secret of happiness is to invert the process of selfishness: to forget self in order to make room for Another Person, the Lord of life and happiness. Give up self and find God! If I renounce sin, I find grace, if I renounce myself, I find God and my brothers and sisters. “If you only knew what God is offering,” happiness is what He wants to give you! How often a priest should ask himself this question, or a woman who wonders “shall I have a child or not”, “am I thinking of myself, or of the child who cannot come into the world without my help?” If you knew what gift of Life, you would throw yourself into that well and there you would find the strength to renounce self.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, with wisdom typical of saints, explained why we should give ourselves to God: “Why should we give ourselves completely to God? Because God has given Himself to us. If God who owes us nothing is ready to give us nothing less than Himself, can we respond with only a small part of ourselves? Giving ourselves totally to God is a way of receiving God. I am for God and God is for me. I live for God and
renounce myself, in this way I allow God to live for me. To possess God we must allow Him to possess our souls. (Blessed Teresa di Calcutta).

"Be made clean"
MARY HEALY
In the ancient world, leprosy was a deadly and terrifying disease. Besides the disfiguring sores, the oozing pus, and the shame of being considered accursed by God, lepers were social outcasts. They were required by the Law of Moses to live apart from human society, and wherever they went they had to rend their garments and shout, Unclean, unclean (Lv 13:45)....

As Jesus was traveling from village to village in Galilee, a leper approached him with surprising boldness. This man must have heard the rumors about Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth who was healing the sick, and in his desperation he resolved to act. Braving the disapproval and disgust of others, he came and knelt before Jesus and voiced his plea: If you will, you can make me clean (Mk 1:40).

Seeing the man's wretched condition, Jesus was moved with compassion. The Greek word means physically churned up or stirred with gut-wrenching emotion. It was the deeply human reaction of the Son of God. Jesus never looked upon afflicted people with detachment or indifference, but always with the empathy that comes from knowing the human condition from within. We can imagine the love in his eyes as he replied, I do will it. Be made clean: Does he will to make a man whole, to undo the ravages of the fall? This is what he came for!

According to the Law of Moses, any contact with a leper would render a person unclean. The crowd standing nearby must have gasped in astonishment as they watched Jesus deliberately reach out and touch the man. And before their eyes, the leprosy disappeared.... Instead of the unclean contaminating the clean, the clean had triumphed, as was indisputably proven by the fact that the man was no longer a leper. Jesus' holiness is invincible. No defilement can contaminate him; rather, he removes defilement from whoever approaches him in faith. It is a powerful message for those who feel unworthy even to approach him.

The seductions of Socialism
FATHER GEORGE W. RUTLER

"Socialism in the guise of benevolence exploits the naïve."

Materialism, fantasy and false worship were the temptations Satan thrust at Christ, and he is tempting our nation the same way.

These seductions are a formula for Socialism, which Winston Churchill in 1948 defined as "The philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy."

A poorly educated generation succumbs to adolescent idealism, bereft of history, unaware that a cult of the state has been a consistent failure, costing countless millions of lives in modern times. State worship was resisted by the earliest Christians, who refused to offer incense to Caesar. Socialism is simply Communism not yet in power, and its smiling face in the guise of "Democratic Socialism" quickly scowls once it has control. As the economist Ludwig von Mises showed in various ways, the essence of Socialism is coercion and manipulation. Pope John XXIII, quoting Pope Pius XI, taught in 1961: "No Catholic could subscribe even to moderate Socialism."

Socialism in the guise of benevolence exploits the naïve. As a corollary, Yeats said: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." Lack of conviction moved appeasers to sign the Munich Agreement, and in present times it has ceded the Church's integrity to the Chinese government. Naïve people were scandalized by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, but Stalin and Hitler were simply Socialists in different uniforms. Just as the National Socialist manifesto of 1920 tried to replace the Church with a pastiche of "Positive Christianity," which was Christianity without Christ, so has the Chinese government ordered that images of Christ be replaced with images of Party leader Xi Jinping.

In 1931, Pope Pius XI denounced the exaltation of the state as "Idolatry." He insisted that "Religious socialism, Christian socialism, are contradictory terms; no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist." From a conviction born of suffering under National Socialism and Soviet Socialism, Pope John Paul II maintained that "the fundamental error of Socialism is anthropological...[because it] considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism..." As the Catholic Church is the largest charitable organization in the world, Catholics should note what a present candidate for his party's presidential nomination, who calls himself a Democratic Socialist, said years ago: "I don't believe in charities...government, rather than charity organizations, should take over responsibility for social programs." But Pope Benedict VI has said: "We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces..."
The prophet Samuel warned the Israelites who wanted a king in charge of everything: "He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves" (1 Samuel 8:17). That voice is louder now.

**Yes, I’d Become Catholic Again**

MICHAEL PAKALUK—The Catholic Thing

If I were an eager "C.S. Lewis" Protestant – as I once was – I would become a Catholic, here and now, again.

A recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Saxum Holy Land Dialogues led me to think carefully about the question of whether today, given the crisis and confusion in the Church, if I were an eager "C.S. Lewis" Protestant — as I once was — I would become a Catholic, here and now, again.

In part, it was because the young professionals I accompanied in Saxum YPS wanted to hear about my earlier conversion to Catholicism as a grad student, so I was compelled to re-examine my motives. In part, it was because a pilgrimage offers something like the fullest possible means to embrace Christianity for a Protestant.

I prayed in Gethsemane and stood atop Golgotha. I read the Beatitudes in my Greek New Testament, while looking out over the Sea of Tiberias. I sang *Adeste Fideles* in fellowship with other believers in the grotto of Bethlehem. But doing all that, what would I still lack, if I were a Protestant as before? So I took an inventory for myself, and here is my tally.

First, I’d lack the Canon of the Mass. This may seem a strange item to place first. Yet I remember clearly that, as a Protestant, it was difficult to find proper expressions of worship. Almost always, the language used was merely emotional, or merely human, or lacking some essential element.

Whatever the gripes of some Catholics about the *Novus Ordo*, it remains true that each of the four versions of the Canon of the Mass gives wonderful expression to the essential truths of our faith, and the nature of Christian fellowship, in the context of giving God due worship. These prayers express quite suitably what one looks for and esteems in the Holy Land sites.

Second, I’d lack the Eucharist. Pilgrims are aware that a pilgrimage obliterates separation in place. "Here" (hic, in Latin) becomes the operative word. Here the Word became flesh. Here the precursor of the Lord was born. Here Mary placed the infant Jesus in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes. That is, after all, why one makes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

But we Catholics live and move and have our being among miracles. We all know stories of miracles among our friends. We expect miracles.

But the Eucharist obliterates, as well, differences in time. Our group celebrated Mass in the chapel of the Cenacle. At that liturgy, it was not simply here but also now that the bread became his body and the wine became his blood. And those things, similarly, happen now at every Catholic Mass.

Third, I’d lack the Apostolic Succession. In saying this, I do not mean merely the commonplace point, very true, that Catholics remain under Peter, and Andrew and James, and the other apostles, just as the first Christians were. We therefore live under the form of government that Jesus intended and established. I mean additionally that the Apostolic Succession — with its consistent teaching over time — and the Eucharist are the types of continuity that God clearly cares about.

This point is worth dwelling upon. When you visit a site in the Holy Land, you often find there, today, a Church. And the guide will say something like this: "This church dates to the early 20th century, on a site where archeologists have discovered signs of pilgrimage dating back to the 1st century AD. The Romans built a pagan temple over it. Under Constantine, a basilica was built there, which was destroyed by the Moors. The Crusaders recaptured the place and built a church, which was destroyed by Saladin. The Francis-cans sought from the Sultan and gained approval to build a new church there." And so on.

No holy site has been immune to such revolutions of destruction, rebuilding, and change of control. The identity of a place of pilgrimage seems incredibly left open to chance. Sometimes even a miracle is necessary, such as in Helena’s discovery of the True
Cross. God’s providence in these matters looks genuinely puzzling.
And yet, in contrast, God has clearly taken great care that two things be preserved over time, the Apostolic Succession, together with continuity of teaching, and the celebration of the Eucharist, as originally instituted.
"The fullest possible means to embrace Christianity" for a Protestant is, as it were, left up to chance. But these other things, which a Protestant does not possess, are not left up to chance. (One must count Scripture among the latter — because the Bible does not verify its own canon, or carry along with itself its true interpretation.)

Fourth, I’d lack miracles. As pilgrims, we stood beside the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus created bread and fish to feed the multitude. We saw the pools in Jerusalem of Siloam, where the blind man received his sight, and Bethesda, where the man sick for thirty-eight years was healed. I remember puzzling as a Protestant why there were no longer any miracles.

Many hold that an "Age of Miracles" was necessary only at the beginning, so that Christianity could spread rapidly. (Doesn't it need to be spread now?) But we Catholics live and move and have our being among miracles. We all know stories of miracles among our friends. We expect miracles. There is a Siloam and a Bethesda for any canonization. The Eucharist is a daily miracle.

Fifth, and finally, I’d lack my mother as a Christian, Mary. When I converted, I did so in spite of "the Marian doctrines," not because of them. But I see now that my heart was impoverished then, as well as my faith. A Protestant pilgrim might well wonder why the sites involving Mary, such as her home in Nazareth, where the angel appeared to her, are just as ancient as those involving Jesus and the Apostles. Why did Christians from the start sense that she was so central?
But then reflection on the Word becoming flesh should dispel that wonder, and clarify the connection between Mary, and truth's insertion into place and time. These realities abide. Yes, if I were a "C.S. Lewis" Christian, I’d become a Catholic again, today, by the grace of God, in a heartbeat.

Our First Catholic President?
SEAN FITZPATRICK—crismagazine.com

On Ash Wednesday, the White House released a statement from President Trump. “For Catholics and many other Christians,” it reads, “Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten season that concludes with the joyful celebration of Easter Sunday. Today, millions of Christians will be marked on their foreheads with the sign of the cross. The imposition of ashes is an invitation to spend time during Lent fasting, praying, and engaging in acts of charity. This powerful and sacred tradition reminds us of our shared mortality, Christ’s saving love, and the need to repent and accept the Gospel more fully. We join in prayer with everyone observing this holy day and wish you a prayerful Lenten journey. May you grow closer to God in your faith during this blessed season.”

These are remarkable words to come from a sitting president. But then, much of this presidency is remarkable. Donald Trump has ignited a movement that is unparalleled in modern times. His devil-may-care, go-for-the-jugular manner may not always be gentlemanly, but it’s effective. President Trump is not a perfect president, but he may be the perfect president for a country threatened by left-wing madness. As far as Catholics are concerned, his Ash Wednesday message should stand in contrast to the message coming from the Democratic hopefuls of Super Tuesday, offering some clarity in the confusion and a strong indicator why President Trump deserves and needs Catholic support in the 2020 election.

President Trump’s Lenten statement is one of clear, calm Christianity and a call for those acts that America and Americans most need: prayer, fasting, and charity. Meanwhile, the Democratic candidates are yelling over each other on debate stages and trying to outdo each other in their progressivism as they claw their way to Super Tuesday, united only in a mounting hatred for President Trump as he bravely serves according to his lights and not the entrenched agenda of left-lunging bureaucrats and politicians.

Super Tuesday’s presidential primaries in fourteen states will bring at least one of the candidates closer to the delegate count required to run against President Trump. Whoever emerges victorious, it’s certain that person will campaign for a worldview of political radicalism and moral relativism. The Democratic nominee, whoever he may be, will unleash a fresh barrage of contempt for the President in keeping with the unprecedented backlash of antipathy we have already seen against this man who refused, and still refuses, to play the political pattycake of Washington, D.C.

The hatred leveled at President Trump is extraordinary—even demonic—as all hatred must be deemed to some extent. Catholics should take good note of this hatred, and also note that all the "right" people hate President Trump—that is, the Left. “The enemy of my enemy is my friend,” as the saying goes, and Catholics should take seriously the call to side against such hatred with the power of their vote. His Ash Wednesday message of humility and living the Gospel is a comfort because it shows that President Trump is willing to speak the truth. It is a message Catholics can hardly
hope to hear from any Democrat. Ironically, Democrats constantly attack the President as one waging a war on truth. These accusations are difficult to countenance from those who deny the truth of life, sex, and gender, the corruption of big government, the results of elections, and even the existence of objective truth itself. When the truth does not matter, but only political posturing, positioning, and party lines, then the one who speaks truth fearlessly will be a bull in a china shop. President Trump doesn’t care if he is that bull—and he is hated for it.

To be fair, the President also has a self-serving streak about him. Self-aggrandizement and self-promotion have been his bread and butter for decades. These qualities are not among those that make a man virtuous. Manners and morals must matter in government; given his track record, Catholics ought to be wary and qualify their support when he does or says things that are not laudable or virtuous.

But we should support him nonetheless. Catholics should admire and respect all that President Trump has done for the cause of life and truth, and prepare to support him against the hate he will face from his opponent. His Ash Wednesday message is one that Catholics can get behind and, in so doing, they should get behind him for Super Tuesday and beyond.

The Founding Fathers spilt a good deal of ink on the essential role of virtue, both private and public, if freedom or a true republic were to exist. Even though President Trump may not be the most virtuous president history has seen, a man with less (shall we say) self-confidence may have lacked the mettle to take on the Beltway establishment.

Catholics should remain loyal to the President while pushing for virtue as well as victory. Virtue must remain the ideal and vulgarity resisted in the same way that the hatred from the Democrats should be resisted. Being guarded, however, does not exclude being grateful for President Trump and—with prayer and fasting and works of charity—to expect that he will continue to act decisively.

Given the dark hatred of Super Tuesday’s candidates and their affiliates, may Catholics play their part in securing a second term for President Trump to make America great again while bearing in mind the words of President John Adams: “No people can be great who have ceased to be virtuous.” May we grow closer to God in our faith during this blessed season.

There’s undeniable proof for God’s existence. Most people just ignore it

March 3, 2020 (LifeSiteNews) — Surveys indicate that the number of atheists and agnostics in the modern West is ever on the rise. Materialists and secularists regard this as a victory of “reason” over the prejudices of credulity. But is it really so? Or are we not seeing rather a rise in the foolishness caused by lack of attentiveness to reality and a laziness in reasoning about the world we experience?

One of the most important kinds of argument for the existence of God is the “teleological,” from the Greek telos: goal, end, purpose. The teleological argument seeks to establish the existence of God on the basis of the way natural things act for the sake of an end, or on the basis of order and beauty in the world. The argument can take three basic forms: from the nature of desire and the good, from the directed-ness of things to ends, and from the beautiful design of natural things or their parts.

All things — it’s obvious, at least, with living beings — act for the good — that is, something good for them. A thing would not begin to move unless it was moved by a desired end. Yet it is impossible to maintain that this is good for that, and that again for something else, unless there is a first and most desirable good that draws all other things to itself. Without somehow having a likeness to or sharing in that supreme good, no inferior good could have the character of an end to be sought.

In one of his famous “Five Ways” — that is, five demonstrations of the existence of God — St. Thomas Aquinas, whose feast is traditionally celebrated on March 7, the day of his birth into eternal life, appeals to the consistently purposeful behavior of non-intellectual beings:

We see that some things which lack knowledge operate for the sake of an end; which is apparent from this, that always or more frequently they operate in the same way, so that they may attain to that which is best; hence it is clear that it is not by chance, but by tendency, that they arrive at the end. But those things which do not have knowledge do not tend towards an end except as directed by something which is knowing and understanding, as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore, there is some intelligent being by which all natural things are ordered to an end, and this we call God. (Summa theologiae, I.2.3)

The crucial premise in this argument is that intelligence alone can be responsible for directing one thing to another in an orderly way, because only intelligence grasps the proportion between the end to be attained and the means to be employed. In other words, intelligence compares existing means to an end not yet existing in reality but only in thought or intention.

If someone asks me to cook breakfast, I have to know several things: there are eggs sitting in the refrigerator; they can...
be cracked and beaten; the pan can be heated up and the eggs cooked in butter with a spatula; and finally, they can be served as food on plates. It seems simple, and we take such things for granted, but it takes only a moment’s thought to appreciate how complex the activity is. I have to understand multiple available means and their relationship to one another and then execute the actions in an orderly manner to reach the goal successfully. If I put the carton into the pan, or crack the eggs over the floor, or put the heat too low or too high, or make any number of other blunders, the project will fail. Experience with small children in kitchens is enough to make us realize anew the intelligence and skill required for even elementary kitchen work, let alone gourmet cooking.

Now consider the natural world. From birth, a spider “knows” how to weave webs according to a sophisticated geometrical pattern that takes into account tension, wind, visibility, size of prey, and other such variables. Although lacking intelligence to understand, deliberate, and execute actions freely, the spider perfectly attains its end of capturing insects as food — and this, moreover, as one step in a larger program of maintaining its life and perpetuating its species. Just as the arrow would never reach the target unless directed to it by an archer, so the spider could not weave its web and perpetuate its species unless it were directed by an intelligent being who implants in the spider its well ordered instincts.

Observation of the behavior of the hunting wasp in particular convinced the famous entomologist J. Henri Fabre that the modern theory of instinct, which derives the highly intricate behavior of animals from a long sequence of chance events, is the worst of all “just-so stories.” This wasp has to sting its prey in nine precise places along the principal nerve in order to paralyze rather than kill it, so that the wasp larva can feast on a living caterpillar. If the caterpillar is not stung in precisely this way and these places (and the probability of doing that by chance is vanishingly small), the larva will not have proper food, and the species will die out. Since the adult wasp dies before the larva grows up, every wasp must be born with the ability to perform this sophisticated act. If the ability or “know-how” does not pre-exist, the species will not be able to exist.

The same thing can be seen in any plant or animal. All arrive on the scene of nature with a manner of operating suited to their needs, the result neither of internal intelligence nor of chance. Each insect, bird, flower, tree “inherits” this inborn behavior from its progenitors, who inherited it from their progenitors. (There can be, among higher animals, a certain amount of learning that takes place, but it is always within the realm of their inborn capacities and tendencies, and it never goes beyond the level of sensation of singulars.)

It is impossible to attribute such perfection of design to the factors mentioned above — learning, chance, reason in the creature itself. The only possible explanation is that it has been inscribed in their being by the supreme Artist of nature. Truly, then, as the Psalmist says, it is only “the fool” who “hath said in his heart: There is no God” (Ps 13[14]:1).