



A YEAR  
WITH THE  
**CHURCH  
FATHERS**

PATRISTIC WISDOM  
FOR DAILY LIVING

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CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

## DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of Thomas Comerford Lawler  
(1920-2005), longtime editor of the *Ancient Christian Writers* series.

Quotations from Scripture are from the Revised Standard Version  
(Catholic Edition), unless the writer's argument depends on a  
significantly different translation, such as the Septuagint.



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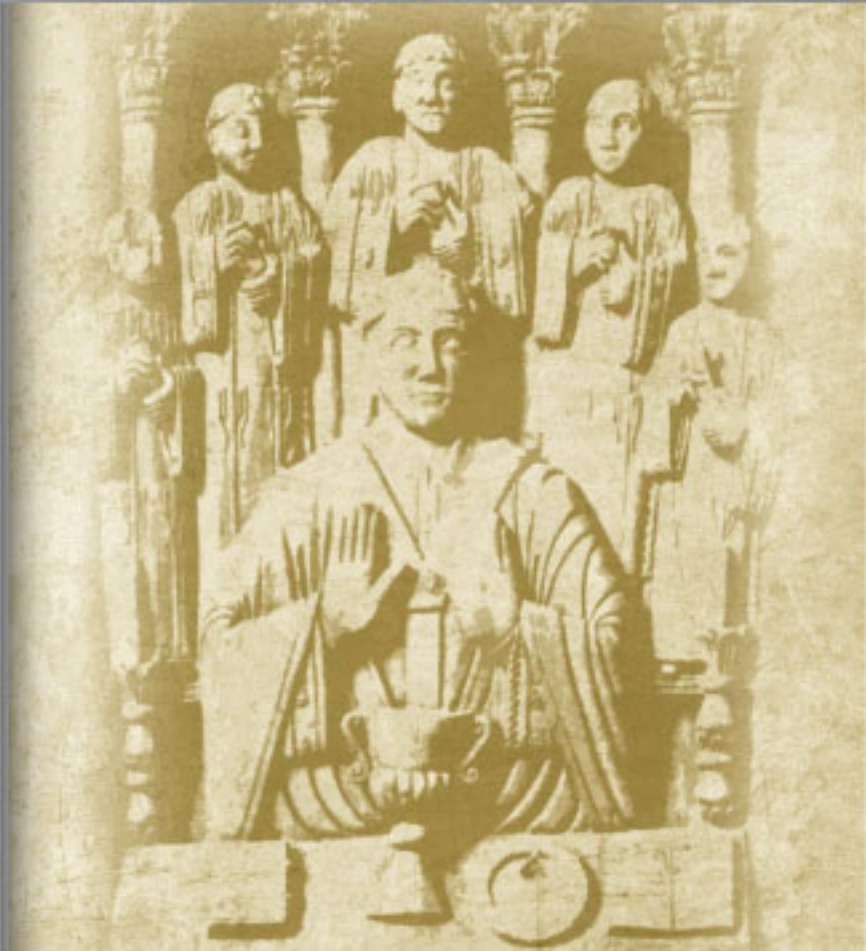
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## *The Daily Readings*



## Put God at the beginning

*No matter what scientific explanation you come up with for the origin of the universe, says St. Basil, you'll go far wrong if you don't put God at the beginning of it.*

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

I stop struck with admiration at this thought. What shall I say first? Shall I demonstrate the vanity of the Gentiles? Shall I praise the truth of our faith?

The philosophers of Greece have tried very hard to explain nature, and not one of their systems has remained firm and unshaken. They are enough in themselves to destroy one another. Those who were too ignorant to rise to a knowledge of God could not allow that an intelligent cause presided at the birth of the universe—a primary error that trapped them in sad consequences.

Some fell back on material principles and attributed the origin of the universe to the elements of the world. Others imagined that atoms, and invisible bodies, molecules and tubes, unite to form the nature of the visible world.

It is because they did not know how to say, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Fooled by their inherent atheism, they thought that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that everything was given up to chance.

To keep us from this error, the writer on creation, from the very first words, enlightens our understanding with the name of God: “In the beginning God created.”

—St. Basil, *Hexameron*, 1.2

### IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

In a world where science has made so much progress, what does it mean to put God at the beginning?

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Father, you alone are eternal, and you alone live in unapproachable light. I thank you that you have made us in your image; have mercy on my sins, and save me through your Son Jesus Christ.*

## See God everywhere

*St. John Cassian remembers how the wise old abbot Moses told him to see God everywhere. If you approach with a pure heart, the world around you will show you His face.*

We certainly do discover God by admiring his incomprehensible essence, which still lies hidden in the hope of the promise. But we also see him through the greatness of his creation, and the consideration of his justice, and the help of his daily providence. We see him when with pure minds we contemplate what he has done with his saints in every generation, when with trembling heart we admire his power, with which he governs, directs, and rules all things, or the vastness of his knowledge, and that eye of his from which no secrets of the heart can lie hidden.

We see him when we consider the sand of the sea, and the number of the waves measured by him and known to him, when in our wonder we think that the drops of rain, the days and hours of the ages, and all things past and future are present to his knowledge; when we gaze in unbounded admiration on that ineffable mercy of his, which with unwearied patience endures countless sins that are every moment being committed under his very eyes. We see God in the numberless opportunities of salvation he grants to those whom he is going to adopt. We see him in the way he made us be born so that from our very cradles his grace and the knowledge of his law might be given to us.

Finally, we see him in the way he undertook the dispensation of his Incarnation for our salvation, and extended the marvels of his sacraments to all nations.

But there are numberless other considerations of this sort, which arise in our minds according to the character of our life and the purity of our heart, by which God is either seen by pure eyes or embraced.

—St. John Cassian, *Conferences*, 1.15

### IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Are earthly affections keeping me from a real contemplation of God?

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Father, I give thanks and praise to you who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, fountains, rivers, lakes, and mankind after your own image; and above all that you did not forsake us when we erred, but drew us back to your heavenly mystery.*

## When God speaks, hear

*God speaks to us through Scripture and the Church. But God also speaks to us through our reason, says St. Augustine. The truth is God speaking to us, not through our ears, but through our minds.*

It is a great thing for a man, and a very rare one, after contemplating the whole creation, corporeal and incorporeal, and seeing how changeable it is, to pass beyond it, to reach to the unchangeable being of God, and—in that peak of contemplation—to learn from God himself that no one but God has made everything outside God.

God speaks with us, not by means of some some audible creature making a sound, so that vibrations of the air connect the one who speaks with the one who hears. Nor does he even speak by means of a spiritual being with the appearance of a body, such as we see in dreams or similar states—for even in that case, God is speaking as if to our bodily ears, because he is speaking by means of the appearance of a body, and with the appearance of a real space between him and us, visions being exact representations of real things.

No, God does not speak by these things, but by the truth itself—if anyone is prepared to hear with the mind rather than with the body. For he speaks to that part of us that is better than everything else in us. Only God, in fact, is better than that part of us.

—St. Augustine, *City of God*, 11.2

### IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Do I use my reason the way God intended—listening carefully for his truth?

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, your voice is my joy; your voice surpasses every pleasure. Let me hear your voice when you speak, and let me reflect on the wonderful things you have made.*

## Who Are the Fathers?



Some dates are approximate. The titles of “Saint” and “Father” have, in some individual cases, been contested. Here I follow Dr. Matthew Bunson’s *Encyclopedia of Saints* as well as the standards spelled out in my book *The Fathers of the Church: Expanded Edition*.

**St. Ambrose:** Bishop of Milan, One of the four Great Fathers of the West and a Doctor of the Church, d. 397.

**St. Aphrahat:** Fourth-century monk, known as the Persian Sage.

**St. Asterius:** Fourth-century bishop of Amasea, known for his preaching.

**St. Athanasius:** Bishop of Alexandria, and champion of orthodoxy against the Arian heresy; one of the four Great Fathers of the East and a Doctor of the Church, d. 370.

**Athenagoras:** Second-century Athenian philosopher and apologist.

**St. Augustine:** Among the most influential figures in history; one of the four Great Fathers of the West and a Doctor of the Church, d. 430.

**St. Basil the Great:** Bishop of Caesarea in Pontus, brother of St. Gregory of Nyssa. One of the four Great Fathers of the East and a Doctor of the Church, d. 379.

**St. Clement of Alexandria:** Theologian and catechist, d. 215.

**St. Clement of Rome:** The third pope (according to most lists) and a disciple of the apostles, d. 97.

**Commodianus:** Christian Latin poet, dates unknown.