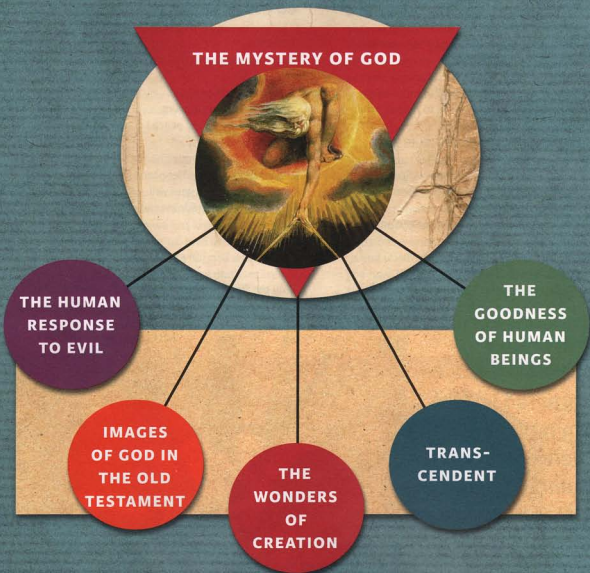


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God Reaches Out to Us in Many Ways



THE FIVE
PROOFS OF
ST. THOMAS
AQUINAS

**PRIME
MOVER**

**UNCREATED
CREATOR**

**NECESSARY
BEING**

**PERFECT
STANDARD**

**INTELLIGENT
DESIGNER**

IN THIS CHAPTER WE DISCUSS SOME OF THE reasons why people believe in God. In particular we explore how the world of nature can reveal God to us. We also explore the teaching of the Church which says that, through our human reason, we can begin to know God

HUMAN ATTRIBUTES THAT POINT TO GOD'S EXISTENCE

OUR OPENNESS TO TRUTH AND BEAUTY

OUR SENSE OF MORAL GOODNESS

OUR FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

OUR LONGINGS FOR THE INFINITE AND FOR HAPPINESS

Faith Focus: These teachings of the Catholic Church are the primary focus of the doctrinal content presented in this chapter:

- ⊙ The existence of God can be known with certainty from the natural light of human reason.
- ⊙ Creation manifests the existence and glory of God.
- ⊙ God is transcendent; it is not possible for us to comprehend fully the Mystery of God by the use of our intellect and natural reason.
- ⊙ The gift of faith enables us to come to know God and all that he has revealed in a way that the natural light of human reason cannot do;
- ⊙ The human person participates in the wisdom and goodness of God and shares in the very life and love of God.
- ⊙ God gives the human person the ability to know and to choose the true and the good.
- ⊙ The natural moral law is the foundation of the law that God has revealed.

Discipleship Formation: As a result of studying this chapter and discovering the meaning of the faith of the Catholic Church for your life, you should be better able to:

- ⊙ reaffirm your belief in God and his existence;
- ⊙ be open to seeing the power and wonder of God in the created universe;
- ⊙ develop a deeper confidence in your belief in the existence of God through the use of your own intellect and reason;
- ⊙ recognize the goodness you see in the lives of human beings as manifestations of the goodness of God;
- ⊙ be more aware of the presence of God in your life and of how you can respond to his presence.

Scripture References: These Scripture references are quoted or referred to in this chapter:

OLD TESTAMENT: Deuteronomy 32:11; Psalms 8:3–9, 18:2, 19:1–4, 23:1–3, 29:7–8; **Wisdom** 13:1–3, 5

NEW TESTAMENT: Romans 1:20

Faith Glossary: Familiarize yourself with the meaning of these key faith terms. Definitions are found in the Glossary: **Creation, Divine Revelation, faith, human person, intellect/reason, Magisterium, moral law, Mystery of God, Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, transcendence**

Faith Word: transcendence

Learn by Heart: Psalm 19:1; Psalm 23:1–3

Learn by Example: St. Katharine Drexel

Is it reasonable to believe in God?

On September 21, 1897, an editorial appeared in the *New York Sun* which has since become a classic of Christmas lore. It was written in response to the following letter:

Dear Editor. I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says,

'If you see it in *The Sun* it's so.' Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?
Virginia O'Hanlon, 115 West Ninety-Fifth Street

The editorial, entitled 'Is There a Santa Claus?', was written by Francis Church. Here are some extracts from it.

Is there a Santa Claus?

Virginia. Your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except [what] they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no



Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world. . . .

No Santa Claus! Thank God! He lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

OVER TO YOU

- ⊙ What do you think are the ‘most real things in the world’ that we cannot see?

A QUESTION OF FAITH

Many people in the past and in the present have given ‘reasons’ for their belief in God’s existence. Many of these reasons come from the use of their ‘intellect’, or God-given natural ability to come to know ‘truth’. We can look at these reasons and ask, ‘Do they make sense?’ But coming to know God is about more than using our ‘intellect’ and reasoning powers. Coming to know and believe in God and in all that he has revealed is a gift, the gift of **faith**, which, with the help of God’s grace, we will accept.

We can come to grasp with certainty that God exists from the use of our intellect, by the ‘natural light of human reason’. The Church teaches that ‘man can come to know that there exists a reality which is the first cause and final end of all things’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], no. 34). St. Thomas Aquinas and other great teachers of the Church have taught ‘that everyone calls [that reality] “God”’ (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1, 2, 3, quoted in CCC, no. 34). (We explore St. Thomas’ proofs for the existence of God in more detail later in this chapter.) The Church affirmed this teaching of the Fathers of the Church at Vatican Council I (December 8, 1869—September 1, 1870). The Council taught:

‘Our holy mother, the Church, holds and teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason’ [Vatican Council I, *Son of God (Dei Filius)*, 2]. Without this capacity, man would not be able to welcome God’s revelation. Man has this capacity because he is created ‘in the image of God’ [see Genesis 1:27].

—CCC, no. 36

The gift of faith enables us not only to know that God exists, but also to come to *know* God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the Holy Trinity—and all that he has revealed, in a way that the natural light of human reason could never do on its own. ‘What moves us to believe

is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of natural reason: we believe “because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived”’ (Vatican I, *Son of God*, 3, quoted in CCC, no. 156).

No one can see God, but we can *experience* God through other people and through the world around us. From these experiences we can also come to *know* that God is really present in our lives and in the world. For all creation is a manifestation of the Creator. This knowledge can lead us to respond in faith to God, who reveals himself to us. ‘In faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace: “Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace”’ (CCC, no. 155, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 11–11, 2, 9).

TALK IT OVER

- ⊙ Do you know people who really believe in God? Why do you think they do?
- ⊙ Have you ever had a conversation with your friends about whether they believe in God or not? What were their reasons for believing or not believing in God?

JOURNAL EXERCISE

- ⊙ Why do you believe in God? Write about the last time you really/sincerely prayed to God.



The heavens proclaim the glory of God

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1968, three men, for the very first time in human history, circled just above the moon in the *Apollo 8* spacecraft. The three, Frank F. Borman, James A. Lovell and William A. Anders, then made a TV broadcast of Christmas greetings to Earth, during which they read the first ten verses of the Book of Genesis, which begins: 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. . . .'

REFLECT AND DISCUSS

- Imagine what it would feel like to read these verses if you were looking out the window of a spacecraft onto the surface of the moon and into empty space.

- How do you think you would feel looking down on Earth from space?

THE STORY OF GOD IS WRITTEN IN THE NATURAL WORLD

The *Catechism* presents three paths through which every person can come to know God: **creation**, the **human person** and **Divine Revelation**. (See *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* [USCCA], 3.) In this chapter we explore the first two.

Both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly state that God and his glory is reflected in creation.

For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.

—Wisdom 13:5

Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.

—Romans 1:20

The author of Psalm 19 imagines how it would be if the sky itself, and even the days and nights, could talk to one another and proclaim out loud that God is their Creator. The psalmist then goes on to recognize that, even though these works of Creation can't use words to communicate, still, by their very existence, they proclaim the glory of God.

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech,



'EARTHRISE': EARTH PHOTOGRAPHED FROM LUNAR ORBIT BY APOLLO 8

and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

—Psalm 19:1–4

People have always had difficulty describing God; he is Ultimate Mystery and far more than our human mind, our intellect and reason, can ever comprehend on its own. The biblical authors had to try to find words to help people to understand and know God. So they used words that described things they had experienced and did know about. They said, for example, that God speaks like thunder or like a soft gentle whisper. They said that God's action is like the storm, the earthquake, the flood or the avalanche. They described God as a mighty king, a stern judge, a gentle midwife, a loving father or mother. They spoke of God using figurative language and by analogy. Starting from the many and diverse reflections of God manifested in his creatures, we can really begin to name God. These characteristics of creatures are likenesses of and point to, in a limited way, the infinite God.

The Bible uses all these words and images to talk about God. Here are some more of the images we find in the Bible:

When talking about how God looked after Jacob:

As an eagle sits upon its nest
and hovers over its young;
as it spreads its wings, takes them up,
and bears them aloft on its pinions,
the LORD alone guided him.

—Deuteronomy 32:11

The psalmist wrote:

The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my
deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my
stronghold.

—Psalm 18:2

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters,
he restores my soul.

—Psalm 23:1–3

The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of
fire.

The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

—Psalm 29:7–8

Through the use of our intellect and reason we can come to know both that God exists and certain qualities of God. We can get a glimpse into the inner life and reality of the divine **Mystery** who is God. But our minds, or intellect and will, are limited in what they can come to know about who God is; namely, that God is Trinity—there is one God in three divine Persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

TALK IT OVER

- ⊗ Which of the above quotations appeals most to you? Discuss your choice, explaining why you chose it.

LET THOSE WHO HAVE EYES SEE, AND THOSE WHO HAVE EARS HEAR!

Do you think that the elements of nature, by their very existence, communicate something of God to us today in the twenty-first century? In Old Testament times, long before our technological age, people's lifestyles and modes of transport meant that they were physically closer to nature than people are today. Could it be that we have become so distant from the natural world and so surrounded by city streets and the trappings of modern living that we are insulated from the processes of nature? We are no longer familiar enough with the stars and the planets. Could this mean that nature does not speak to us and that we are, therefore, somewhat isolated from God and his Revelation in the natural world?

Novelists, poets and playwrights have always spoken to the deepest realities of life. Your study of literature throughout high school will provide you with many opportunities to listen to both the hearts and minds of those whose writings have inspired readers to reflect on the deeper meanings of their experiences. Read and



reflect on this example from the opening lines of the well-known poem 'Leisure' by W. H. Davies (1871–1940):

What is this life if full of care
we have no time to stand and stare?

WHAT ABOUT YOU PERSONALLY?

- ⊙ Have there been times when you wished that you had more time just to 'stand and stare'? Explain.
- ⊙ When was the last time that you did 'stand and stare'? What did you 'see'? What thoughts were in your mind at that time?
- ⊙ Have you ever just stopped and thought 'AWESOME!'? Did the idea of the Creator, of God, come to you? Explain.
- ⊙ What particular aspect of the world of nature speaks to you most eloquently of God's power and grandeur?
- ⊙ How do you respond to 'seeing' God in nature? What responsibilities does this give you?

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

The author of the Book of Wisdom, writing about a hundred years before the time of Jesus, reflected on how pagans thought that parts of the visible universe were gods because they were so awesome:

For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire, or wind, or swift air or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods who ruled the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their LORD.

—Wisdom 13:1–3

Why do you think so many ancient people worshipped elements of nature as though they were gods? Are there any 'false gods' in our time? Like what? And why do people 'worship' them?

Today, some agnostics (those who can't decide if God exists) and some atheists (those who assert that there is no God) think that evolution is the *only* explanation for why everything exists. They assert that the universe and everything in it came into existence spontaneously; that is, without any help from an outside power. What do you think?

We can begin to know God through human reasoning

OPENING CONVERSATION

- What prompts you to reflect on the existence of God?

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Christian theologians, such as St. Augustine, point to the universe as evidence of God. Augustine is quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Question the beauty of the sea . . . question the beauty of the sky . . . These beauties are subject to change. Who made them if not the Beautiful One who is not subject to change?

—CCC, no. 32



JIM CARREY IN BRUCE ALMIGHTY

As human beings, with our human intellects, it is impossible for us to grasp *fully* what God is like or who God is. God is bigger than our understanding. St. Augustine once said that if you thought you could fully understand God, it would not be God that you understood.

When we talk about God, we are trying to talk about the One that we have never and can never experience fully through our human capacities. We can never experience or even imagine what it is like to be eternal or almighty. God is infinitely more than anything we can say. God is *beyond* anything we could ever imagine.

In the movie *Bruce Almighty*, Bruce 'becomes' Almighty God for a short period of time. It is a comedy with some good laughs, but how much can it tell us about what God is really like? God *transcends*, that is, goes beyond, all human thinking . . . or else, as Augustine said, we are not talking about God at all . . . just Bruce Almighty!

Our human intelligence is not able to grasp the Mystery who is God. But we can get *some* idea about who God is and what he is like from the various ways in which he makes himself known; for example, through the wonders and miracles of the natural world, and through people who, by their lives of love and service of God and others, show the divine love of God at work in and through them. We can come to know God most fully and clearly through the Person, life and teaching of Jesus, through divinely inspired **Sacred Scripture** and the teaching (**Sacred Tradition**) of the Church.

We can also begin to know God through human reasoning. Let's read now about one man who showed how we can use our reason to come to know God in this way.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Thomas Aquinas was born in Aquino in Italy in 1225. As a young man he decided to join the newly founded Dominican order. His family objected strongly and tried to dissuade him, even going so far as to imprison him for more than a year. When free again, he studied first in Paris and then in Cologne, where his teacher was St. Albert the Great. Thomas was a big man, but very quiet and usually silent in class. Albert called him ‘the dumb ox, whose bellow would astonish the world’. (By ‘dumb’, he did not mean ‘stupid’ but ‘one who does not talk’.)

At that time, knowledge of ancient Greek philosophy, especially of Aristotle, was coming into Europe through Muslim authors. Thomas took on the challenge of reconciling this new learning with Christian theology. His great work, the *Summa Theologica*, used human reasoning to explore the divinely revealed truths of the Bible and bring them and the new ideas from Greek philosophy into harmony. His ‘solution’ has lasted into our own day, though it was challenged by scientists like Isaac Newton in the seventeenth century.

Through the use of his own intellect, Thomas Aquinas worked out ‘five proofs’ for the existence of God. While they are not scientific proofs, they give us sound and compelling reasons for

God’s existence. In many ways, they all boil down to ‘the argument from causality’, as Aquinas called it. The argument from causality states that everything that exists must have a cause, so there must be an Original Cause of all that is. As the Church teaches: ‘God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason’ (CCC, no. 36).

Near the end of his life, Thomas Aquinas had a mystical experience, after which he abruptly stopped writing. He said that anything he had written up to then was just straw, because now he had had a glimpse of the reality of God. Thomas Aquinas died in 1274, was canonized a saint and named a doctor or teacher of the Church. He is the patron of Catholic schools.

TALK IT OVER

- ⊙ St. Thomas Aquinas’ ‘five proofs’ are given below. Think about these arguments for a few minutes. Then discuss which one makes most sense to you and which is the most difficult to understand.

WHAT ABOUT YOU PERSONALLY?

- ⊙ What are some of your own best ‘reasons’ for believing in God?



THE ANCIENT OF DAYS | WILLIAM BLAKE

The five proofs of St. Thomas Aquinas

- ⊙ The existence of a **prime mover**—nothing can move itself; there must be a first mover. The first mover is called God.
- ⊙ Cause of existence—things that exist are created by other things; nothing can create itself. There must be, at the beginning, an **uncreated creator**, called God. God is the first cause of everything that is.
- ⊙ The existence of a **necessary Being**, which causes the existence of others. This necessary Being is called God.
- ⊙ Degrees of perfection—for any given quality (for example, beauty, goodness) there must be a **perfect standard** by which all such qualities are measured. This perfect standard is called God.
- ⊙ Intelligent design—we can see that the universe has intelligence and intelligent beings, and there is one **intelligent Being, God**, who directs them to their end.

Consider other arguments for God's existence

We live in a time when many are arguing that there is no God. Looking at the chaos in the world, they maintain that the existence of evil—the violence, the suffering—simply negates any arguments, or proofs, for God's existence. Some thinkers actually point to the negative reaction of the vast majority of people to such violence and suffering as an argument for the existence of God.

REFLECT AND DISCUSS

- ① Remember the outrage at what happened on 9/11? Or can you recall how people reacted to any of the high school massacres of recent years? Do you remember a time in your own life when you just knew that what you saw happening was wrong? For example, have you ever seen someone being bullied or being treated unfairly, or someone taking something that didn't belong to them, or have you ever heard someone saying something that you just knew was untrue? Can you remember how you felt at these times? What words would you use to describe those feelings?
- ② Where do you think such feelings come from?

CONSIDER THE HUMAN RESPONSE TO EVIL

Some philosophers propose that we can know of God from the reaction of most humans to evil. This is evidence of the fact that there is a **moral law** deeply embedded in the heart of people. This law is 'natural' to man, embedded in his very nature and rooted in the reality that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God and shares in the very life of God. Its origin is God. It is immutable and permanent and cannot be removed from the human heart.



Man participates in the wisdom and goodness of the Creator who gives him mastery over his acts and the ability to govern himself with a view to the true and the good. The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie: . . .

—CCC, no. 1954

Even if no one ever said anything to us about right and wrong, what is good and what is evil, there are things that we as human beings would automatically recognize and acknowledge as being good or evil. This innate sense comes from God. The natural moral law 'provides the solid foundation on which man can build the structure of moral rules to guide his choices' (CCC, no. 1959) and it is the foundation of the law revealed by God.

Obviously, how you judge the rightness or wrongness, the good or evil, of something is

influenced by the things you have learned and by the things people have told you about right and wrong. It is the responsibility of the **Magisterium** of the Church to interpret and teach the moral law, both natural and revealed.

TALK IT OVER

- ⊙ Does this argument for the existence of God make sense to you? Explain.

DEBATE

- ⊙ Have a debate on the argument outlined above for the existence of God, with one side finding this argument convincing, the other finding it unconvincing.

The following are extracts from private reflections written by Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910–97). Mother Teresa's life of dedicated service to the abandoned and forgotten poor of Calcutta was acknowledged not only by the Church, who has named her Blessed Mother Teresa, but also by the world community, who honored her with the Nobel Peace Prize. In these reflections she recalls her initial experiences of ministering with the poor as a Missionary of Charity. Read them and see if you think they further support the argument that human beings have an in-built and God-given sense of right and wrong.

The dark holes of the poor

We started at Taltala and went to every Catholic family.—The people were pleased—but the children were all over the place—and what dirt and misery—what poverty and suffering—I spoke very, very little, I just did some washing of sores, and dressings, and gave medicine to some.—The old man lying on the street—not wanted—all alone just sick and dying—I gave him carbonsone and water to drink and the old man was so strangely grateful. . . .

Then we went to Taltala Bazaar, and there was a very poor woman dying of starvation

more than TB. What poverty. What actual suffering. I gave her something which will help her to sleep—but the woman was longing to have some care. I wonder how long she will last—she was just 96 degrees at the time. She ask a few times for confession and Holy Communion.—I felt my own poverty there too—for I had nothing to give that poor woman.—I did everything I could but if I had been able to give her a hot cup of milk or something like that, her cold body would have got some life. . . .

I believe that some are saying what use of working among these lowest of the low, that the great—the learned and the rich are ready to come [so] it is better to give full force to them. Yes, let them all do it.—The Kingdom must be preached to all. If the Hindu and Muslim sick people can have the full service and devotion of so many nuns and priests, surely the poorest of the poor and the lowest of the low can have the love and the devotion of us few. 'The Slum Sister,' they call me, and I am glad to be just that for His glory and love.



JUDGE AND DECIDE

- ⊗ How do you think you would have felt had you seen what Mother Teresa saw in Calcutta?
- ⊗ Where do you think your reaction to such poverty and suffering might come from? Could it come from God?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* lists the following attributes of human beings as pointers toward God's existence: our openness to truth and beauty; our sense of moral goodness; our freedom for the voice of our conscience; our longings for the infinite and for happiness. (See CCC, no. 33.)

The poet Patrick Kavanagh wrote:

God is in the bits and pieces of
Everyday—
A kiss here and a laugh again, and sometimes
tears,
A pearl necklace round the neck of poverty.

Kavanagh could see God in the ordinary, everyday world around him. Likewise, a wise man was once asked, 'Do you believe in miracles?' He responded, 'How could I dispute what I see happening in front of my eyes every moment of every day?'

REFLECT AND DISCUSS

- ⊗ What do you think of Kavanagh's argument that God is manifested in the 'Everyday'?

JOURNAL EXERCISE

- ⊗ Think about a time when you were very aware of God's presence in the 'bits and pieces' of your own life. Write about your experience.

JUDGE AND RECORD

- ⊗ Discuss and then write the two best arguments for God's existence that you can come up with.

FAITH WORD

Transcendence

Transcendence refers to the idea that God is so 'beyond' the universe, and so different from anything else that exists, that God cannot be directly experienced by human beings. A shorthand way of saying that God is transcendent is: 'God is the absolute Other.'



GOD THE FATHER | COLEGIO MAYOR DE SAN ILDEFONSO, MADRID

JUDGE AND ACT

REFLECT ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

This lesson has outlined evidence and arguments, ancient and contemporary, for the existence of God. Yet there are people who do not believe in God, who deny the existence of God (atheists) or who cannot decide whether or not God exists (agnostics). They argue that faith in God is not reasonable or scientific.

- ⊙ Think for a few moments about what you have learned in this chapter concerning the Mystery of God and the various ways in which human beings can come to know him.

DECIDE FOR YOURSELF

- ⊙ 'The more we know about God, the more we realize that we will never know him fully in

this life.' Do you agree with this statement? Explain.

- ⊙ What real difference will your faith make to your everyday life from here on?
- ⊙ Think of someone with whom you can share your faith in God, perhaps a person who needs a bit of reassurance or encouragement.

The more we know about God, the more we realize that we will never know him fully in this life



The story of St. Katharine Drexel

If God is 'in the bits and pieces of Everyday' (Kavanagh), we must pay attention to all that happens around us so that we will hear what he is revealing to us. Katharine Drexel, now a saint, is an example of someone who did just that. By looking carefully at the world around her and by reflecting on her experiences, she became aware that God was calling her to change her direction in life.

Katharine Drexel was born in Philadelphia in 1858. Her father was an international banker, so her family was very rich. She had an excellent education and enjoyed all the privileges that came with wealth at that time. However, when she nursed her stepmother through a terminal illness, she came to realize that all the money in the world could not buy immunity from pain or death.

Katharine had read a book entitled *A Century of Dishonor* by Helen Hunt Jackson, which explored the plight of Native Americans. While on a European tour, she met Pope Leo XIII and asked him to send some missionaries to Wyoming to help the needy Native Americans there. His answer was: 'Why don't you become a missionary?'

Katharine thought seriously about the Pope's suggestion. When she returned home, she met the Sioux leader Red Cloud and began her systematic aid to Native American

missions. She decided that she would found a religious order and dedicate her life and inheritance to working on behalf of oppressed Native



Americans and African Americans in the West and Southwest US. In 1889 she wrote: 'The feast of St. Joseph brought me the grace to give the remainder of my life to the Indians and the colored.' The newspaper headlines screamed 'Gives Up Seven Million'.

After three years of training, Katharine and her first band of nuns (Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament) opened a boarding school in Santa Fe. By 1942 she had a string of Catholic schools in thirteen states, plus forty mission centers and twenty-three rural schools. Her greatest achievement was the founding of Xavier University in New Orleans, the first US university for African Americans.

At seventy-seven, Katharine suffered a heart attack and had to retire. However, she spent the next twenty years in prayer. Small notebooks and slips of paper record her various prayers and meditations. She died in 1955. Because of her lifelong dedication to her Catholic faith and her selfless service to the oppressed, she was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2000.

OVER TO YOU

- ⊙ What might you learn from Katharine Drexel for your own life?
- ⊙ When have you ever had the sense that God was calling you to do something special with your life? Share your story.

RESPOND IN YOUR HOME

- ⊙ Does your family say 'Grace' before and after meals? If not, might you be able to encourage them to do so?
- ⊙ The word 'grace' in this context means 'thanks'. To say 'Grace' before and after meals is to offer a prayer to God in gratitude for creation, which includes our food and drink, and, of course, the wonderful people who



harvested the food, transported it, cooked it and served it on our table. Traditionally, people pause for a moment before saying Grace in order to reflect on what God and other human beings have done for us. We also remember those who are not so blessed, who may lack food or drink, who are sick and suffering and who today need our support and prayers.

- ⊙ Here is a commonly used 'Grace' for mealtimes:

Before meals: Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts, which we are about to receive from your bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

After meals: We give you thanks for all your benefits, almighty God, who lives and reigns forever. And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

- ⊙ Write your own 'Grace' for mealtimes. Invite your family to pray this at some of your mealtimes.

JOURNAL EXERCISE

- ⊙ Write an account for yourself, that you will be able to look back on and remember when you are older, of any awesome experiences you have had in your life, especially ones that helped to turn your mind and heart toward God. What, for instance, was the most

LEARN BY HEART

The heavens are telling
the glory of God;
and the firmament
proclaims his
handiwork.

PSALM 19:1

The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down
in green pastures;
he leads me beside still
waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right
paths
for his name's sake.

PSALM 23:1-3

wonderful thing you ever saw? (Things seen in the movies or on television or video do not count! You must have been there and seen it yourself.) Where was it? When did you see it? How long did it last? Who was with you? Was anything said? What were your thoughts at the time? Did you do anything? Did you tell people later? Would you like to share this experience with the group now? Did these experiences make you think of God or lead you to question whether he was behind them? If not, might you be asking yourself such questions now, especially in light of what you have learned in this chapter?



PRAYER REFLECTION

Pray the Sign of the Cross together.

LEADER

Together let us give thanks for the many ways in which God's presence is made known to us:

For the vastness of the ocean. . . .

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God.

For the beauty of the sky. . . .

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God.

For the bounty of the fields. . . .

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God.

For the majesty of the mountains. . . .

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God.

For gentle breezes. . . .

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God.

For the creativity of humanity. . . .

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God.

For the nurture of parents. . . .

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God.

LEADER

Loving God, in the presence of these and the many other wonders of our world, we praise and thank you. Open our eyes so that we may be ever more aware of your presence in our lives and in our world. Open our hearts to respond and live as your own people, a people of God.

Let us now recite this heartfelt prayer from the Book of Psalms:

ALL (*either together or individually*)

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.

You have given them dominion over the works
of your hands,

you have put all things under their feet.
all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

—Psalm 8:3–9

LEADER

Ever-loving God, you called Blessed Katharine Drexel to teach the message of the Gospel and to bring the life of the Eucharist to the African American and Native American peoples. By her prayers and example, enable us to work for justice among the poor and the oppressed and keep us united in love in the eucharistic community of your Church. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

ALL

Amen.

LEADER

As we end our prayer reflection, let us ask God to bless us and all those whom we love.

ALL

Amen.

Pray the Sign of the Cross together.

