

# The Ascension Weekly

February 3, 2019

## The Sunrise Summa Men's Group aims to help men keep their gaze on God in the midst of daily life

The Sunrise Summa Men's Group meets the first and third Saturday of each month from 6:30–8:00 am in the basement of the rectory. Breakfast and coffee are provided. It is open to all local Catholic men (not just in the parish) who are interested in reading and discussing philosophy and theology. For this article, we interviewed parishioner Daniel Coleman, who helped launch this group at Ascension in November.

### Q. How was the idea of this men's group at Ascension conceived, and what are its main goals?

A. Over the years I've participated in a number of philosophy/theology discussion groups. I've always found them intellectually and spiritually enriching, and they've also been a good source of friendships. I approached Fr. Larry because I wanted to create a group at Ascension to provide that experience for local Catholic men, by giving them an opportunity to break bread and spend time reading about and discussing our faith from a philosophical perspective. When it comes to synthesizing faith and reason, there is no better book to read than Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, so we decided to start working through it together and see if others were interested in joining.

### Q. For those who do not know, can you tell us about St. Thomas Aquinas and his work that you are studying?

St. Thomas Aquinas was one of the world's greatest ever philosophers and theologians, as well as a great saint and doctor of the Church. He was a 13th century Dominican friar who spent most of his life as a professor and lecturer at time when medieval universities were brimming with new ideas and refining philosophical systems. He wrote many books, but most people consider the *Summa Theologica* — which is Latin for "a manual of theology" — to be his greatest. It's a large work that systematically explores just about every theological topic you can think of. We are using an abridged edition called *A Summa of the Summa*, which was compiled by Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft and which includes helpful explanatory notes on the text.

I think the *Summa Theologica* offers a retreat for the mind and spirit, a chance to put life's stresses and burdens aside in order to gaze on God, who is transcendent. Doing so with Aquinas as your guide gives you a gift of perspective, as though you've climbed a mountain and can see the valley below. We can't all be monks, but by studying the *Summa* we

can at least get a taste of the contemplative life that is refreshing and nourishing to the soul. Our group's conversations always give me something to take away: bits of wisdom and insight from Aquinas that can be used for meditation as I return to my day-to-day responsibilities.

### Q. Which section of the *Summa* are you currently studying, and what is it about?

A. We're still nearly at the beginning! Right now we're finishing St. Thomas' arguments for the existence of God, which are in question 2 of the first part of the book. After that comes questions on what God is like and what we can know about him.

### Q. Scott O'Neal, one of the founding members of the study group, was recently brought fully into the Church, and he took the name of St. Thomas Aquinas as his Confirmation saint. How was this saint impactful to him in his journey to the faith?

A. I sent Scott your question, and he writes: "Growing up as an Evangelical Protestant, my parents gifted me with the general tenants of Christianity, and as I transitioned into adulthood I wanted to take what I believed to a deeper level. But after years of reading Protestant theologians and philosophers, I was unsatisfied with their frameworks for synthesizing philosophy, theology, church history, and Sacred Scripture. Eventually I stumbled onto St. Thomas Aquinas. His articulation of God, creation, and man's role within it encompassed all of the domains of inquiry I was interested in. The intellectual knots I had, which were groaning with strain, started to unravel. They were replaced with order and peace. Through the grace of God and the help of St. Thomas, I went from being confused and hopelessly weary to rejuvenated, clearheaded, and full of hope — it restored my faith."

### Q. Anything else you'd like to highlight?

A. I want others to know that we do as much as we can to keep the burden of participation low. You don't need to have a philosophy degree to attend. There's no "homework" to do ahead of time, because we read everything we discuss during the meeting. You get coffee and a free breakfast just for showing up. We meet early Saturday mornings to minimize schedule conflicts and time away from families — and also so you don't have to come exhausted from a full day of work. You are welcome to come as often as you are able, even if that's only once.

*All men of the parish are encouraged to stop by for the next meeting on Saturday, February 16<sup>th</sup>! If you have questions, please email Daniel Coleman at [danielcoleman@pm.me](mailto:danielcoleman@pm.me).*