

1: What are we?

What are we? The light of reason alone taught the wise of antiquity that the first knowledge to be acquired was a knowledge of ourselves. Hence, they engraved over the entrance to their temples: Know thyself. What, then, are we? The answer should be familiar to you. We are the noblest of all earthly creatures, to whom God has given dominion over all the works of His hands. Think of the innumerable beings with which the earth is inhabited, yet there is one who is clearly above—which is us: we are exalted above all as the height of creation. Our supremacy does not consist in physical strength, nor in agility, but in intelligence—that attribute which distinguishes us from all earthly creatures and likens us to the angels in heaven. What, again, are we? We are reasonable creatures composed of immortal souls and mortal bodies.

1. When we say that we are creatures, we point out our origin: we are the work of God, who has created us to His image and likeness. Since God has created me, and without Him I would not exist, does it not follow that I am absolutely beholden to Him? that I belong to Him as clay to the potter? that I am subject to His authority more than the child to their parents, or the servant to their master?
2. We are reasonable creatures; that is to say, gifted with reason, with intelligence, also with the faculty of speech, which complements intelligence. Behold in this the great gift of God, which on the one hand separates us from the animals, and on the other affiliates us to the angels. We differ, however, from these pure spirits in the nature of our being, which is composed of a spirit and body, whilst the angels are pure spirits and have no bodies.
3. A creature composed of an immortal soul and of a mortal body.

These two parts separate at the moment of death: then our soul begins a new life where there is no more death, and where it is happy or miserable according as its works merit. This separation is, however, temporary: the soul and body shall reunite on the day of the resurrection. Let us never forget, my brethren, the dignity of our nature: created as we are but a little below the angels, let us take care lest by sin we lower ourselves to the level of the animal.

2: What is a Christian?

Having considered our nature and dignity, we now answer: Who is a Christian, and what are their duties? The name of Christian is derived from Christ or Jesus Christ, because the Christian professes the holy religion established by Jesus Christ. St. Luke tells us that it was at Antioch, shortly after the Ascension of their divine Master, that the disciples of Christ were first called Christians. Who, then, is a Christian? A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ, who, being baptized, believes and professes the true doctrine of Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church.

1. First, a Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ. By disciple we mean one who professes to receive instruction from another whom they acknowledge as their master. Now, the Master of the Christian is Jesus Christ; that is to say, the Son of God made man: He who is the eternal wisdom has stooped down from heaven to earth to become our Master! His first disciples were those who heard Him preach, who were the witnesses of His miracles and of His glorious resurrection; these disciples multiplied and perpetuated themselves in every age: such are Christians.
2. By Baptism we become disciples of Jesus Christ, children of God, members of the Church. Without Baptism we cannot be Christians, as in the old law without circumcision no one could be an Israelite.

3. The true faith and the profession of the true doctrine of Jesus Christ distinguish the true Christian from the heretic and the impious, who corrupt the doctrine of the divine Master, or scoff at it and wholly reject it.

4. The true Christian is Catholic—that is to say, they acknowledge the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff; by this they are distinguished from the schismatic or those ignorant of the papal claims. Let us thank God, my brethren, for the grace by which we are true Christians; for it is at once a great glory and a great blessing. A glory, because the Christian is elevated to the dignity of a child of God; a blessing, because God accords them the treasures of His grace on earth, and reserves for them the riches of His happiness in heaven.