January 28th: Memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Priest and Doctor of the Church

Gospel text (*Mt* 23,8-12): Jesus said to his disciples: «You, do not let yourselves be called Master because you have only one Master, and all of you are brothers and sisters. Neither should you call anyone on earth Father, because you have only one Father, he who is in heaven. Nor should you be called leader, because Christ is the only leader for you. Let the greatest among you be the servant of all. For whoever makes himself great shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be made great».

«Whoever humbles himself shall be made great»

Fr. Pere SUÑER i Puig SJ
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, we celebrate the memory of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), member of the Order of Preachers, priest and Doctor of the Church. He devoted all his life to the study and teaching of catholic theology. And he did it, while being conscious of the fact he was serving the Faith, the Church and Mankind.

A service to the faith: theology does not consist either in inventing the faith or in interpreting it in accordance with one's whims. The theologian sets off from the faith of the Church and he strives to understand its true meaning; once this achieved, he tries to reconcile it with the science and culture of his time, without distorting it. By doing this, the theologian does a great service to Mankind, inasmuch he provides it with a mature and profitable access to God's word; rather, to the inerrant "Word of God", which is Jesus Christ, man's salvation. St. Thomas Aquinas understood all this perfectly well and he practiced it. Therefore, the words we read in the Gospel in his memory: «Because Christ is the only leader for you» (Mt 23:10), fully suit him.

Yet, it was not always easy for him. He had to struggle against those who preferred the Greek philosophy -in those days a dazzling novelty- to the faith. But he never submitted his faith to Aristotle, but rather, Aristotle to his faith. His obedience to the hierarchy was absolute and heroic; he offered it his life, since he died, when his strength failed him, while setting out on foot to the II General Council of Lyons, where he had been convoked by the Pope.

He was also conscientious about his theological work which he thought was rendering a great service not only to the proficient, but also to the beginners. In the prologue of his famous Summa Theologica he writes: «We purpose in this book to treat of whatever belongs to the Christian religion, in such a way as may tend to the instruction of beginners».

The Gospel of St. Thomas' day ends up with these words: «For whoever makes himself great shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be made great» (Mt 23:12). Yet, Thomas Aquinas humbled himself by yielding to God's will, to the Church and to man's needs; he deserves to be ennobled. And this is what we do, by celebrating his festivity.