

Sermon on the Deity of Jesus Christ

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.—
John 1:1-5

The word “Gospel” declares how God loved us when He sent our Lord Jesus Christ into the world. We must note this well. For it is important to know how Holy Scripture uses words. Surely we need not stop simply at words, but we cannot understand the teaching of God unless we know what procedure, style and language He uses. We have to note this word, all the more since it is such a common practice to refer to Holy Scripture as the Law and the Gospel. Those who speak thus intend that all the promises contained in the Old Testament should be referred to the word “Gospel.” Surely their intention is good, but Holy Scripture does not speak thus of itself. We should be careful and out of reverence for the Spirit of God retain the manner of speaking which He uses to instruct us.

The word “Gospel” indicates that God in sending our Lord Jesus Christ His Son declares Himself Father to all the world. St. Paul writes to the Ephesians that Jesus Christ came to evangelize those who were near and those who were far from God. Those near were the Jews, who were already allied with God. Those far were the pagans who were aloof from His Church. When we have looked at it in the light of all Scripture we shall find that this word “Gospel” has no other meaning.

That is why this word is the title of the four written histories of how our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, He went about, He died, He rose again, He ascended into heaven. That, I say, comes under the title “Gospel.” And why all that? Because the substance of the Gospel is comprehended in the Person of the Son of God, as I have already said. The Ancient Fathers surely had the promises of salvation. They were well assured that God would be their Father. But they did not have the Guarantee for the love of God and for their adoption. For when Jesus Christ came into the world, God signed and sealed His fatherly love. We have received full testimony of life, the substance of which (as I have already said) we have in Jesus Christ. That is why St. Paul says that all the promises of God are in Him, Yea and Amen. For God then ratified all that He had previously said and had promised to men.

So not without cause those four histories have been named “Gospel,” where it is declared to us how the Son of God was sent, He took human flesh, and He went about with men in this life. All that is comprehended under the name “Gospel,” because it declares to us how God perfected and accomplished everything which was required for the salvation of men, and it was all done in the Person of His Son.

St. Paul can well speak of his gospel, (Romans 2:16) but how so? It is not that he has written a Gospel history, but that his teaching conformed to all that is herein contained. Thus, following what I have already said, when the Gospel is proclaimed to us, it is a manifestation of Jesus Christ, so that in Him we may know that all things are perfected and that we have the truth of that which had been promised from all time. But for all that the Epistles of St. Paul are not named "Gospel." And why not? Because there we have not a continuous history which shows us how God sent His Son, how He willed that assuming our nature He might have true brotherhood with us, how He died, was raised, and ascended into heaven. These things, I say, are not deduced from a single, continuous thread in Saint Paul. It is very certain that the teaching which is contained in his Epistles is conformed to the teaching of the Gospel. But for all that the word is especially ascribed to these four histories, for the reason that I have already alleged.

Now when we say that the substance of the Gospel is comprehended in the Person of the Son of God, that is not only to say that Jesus Christ has come into the world, but that we may know also His office, the charge committed to Him by God His Father, and His power. Let us note the difference between the Gospel according to St. John and the other three. The four Gospel-writers are entirely agreed in that they declare how the Son of God appeared in the world, that He has been made true man, like us in all things except sin. Next they describe how He died, He rose again, and He ascended into heaven. Briefly, all that was committed to Him to draw us to God His Father is there declared.

But there are two things which are peculiar to Saint John. One is that he pays more attention to the teaching of Jesus Christ than do the others. Likewise, he declares to us with greater liveliness His virtue and His power. Surely the others relate well the teaching of Jesus Christ, but more briefly. Little summaries in the others appear as long declarations in Saint John. For example, in John 6 we see what is said of the miracle He did in the desert, when He fed such a multitude. From that Saint John leads up to the proposition that Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life Eternal. We see this teaching of Jesus Christ which is expounded at length by Saint John, and with a greater deduction than is made by the other Gospel-writers, and which was even omitted by them. So it is throughout. For after he has mentioned certain miracles and stories he always comes back to the teaching and finds occasion to put in material treating on the virtue of our Lord Jesus Christ. From John 12 to the narrative of the Passion he treats only of that teaching.

We see now the difference between the Gospel according to Saint John and the other three. To say it better, the Gospel according to Saint John is to us, as it were, the key by which we enter into an understanding of the others. For if we read Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, and Saint Luke we shall not know so well why Jesus Christ was sent into the world as when we shall have read Saint John. Having read Saint John, we shall know then how what our Lord Jesus Christ has done benefits us, that He took human flesh, that He died and rose again. We shall learn, I say, the purpose and the substance of all those things in reading this Gospel. That is why he does not linger over the story, as we shall see by the order which he follows. Surely these things ought to be considered more

at length, but since there is much substance to the text we have to expound, I mention things as briefly as I can.

Let us be content, then, with what I have mentioned in summary of the office of Jesus Christ, namely, that Saint John declares to us how He was sent by God His Father to perfect the salvation of men. He declares how He took human flesh, how He died and rose again, how He is the Guarantee for the love of God, that He is the Soul of our redemption, and that in Him the promises of God are ratified. We must note (as I have already said) that St. John discusses things more briefly than the other three. But he stops longer over the substance to show us the teaching of Jesus Christ, the charge committed to Him by God His Father, briefly, His virtue, His power, and His goodness toward us. The word "Gospel" itself means "good news." But this word ought to be so sacred that we hate the things of this world and that we may know that all our welfare, happiness, joy and glory are in Jesus Christ. When we pronounce the word "Gospel," which is to say "Good News," may we learn not to enjoy without restraint things of this world, which are perishable and vain. Let us not take pleasure, in entertainment's, sensuality's, or anything of that sort, but let us rejoice that Jesus Christ was sent to us, that God gave Himself to us in His Person, that Jesus Christ came to be our means of reconciliation between God and ourselves, that God accepts us as His children, apart from Whom we would be lost and damned. That is why this word should be sacred to us so as to make us prize this priceless gift which is brought to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is said especially that this Gospel is according to St. John, so that we may know that it is not of a mortal man but that Saint John is only the minister of it. From whom, then, shall we say we have the Gospel? From Saint John or from Jesus Christ? It is from Jesus Christ. Even Jesus Christ uses this manner of speaking when He says the doctrine is not His own but He preaches it upon the authority of God His Father, from Whom it proceeds. That is so that we may hold all the more reverence for this doctrine and that we may not receive it as a common thing, but as the pure truth of God which has been proclaimed by His Only Son. Saint John, then, was surely the instrument and organ of God, as a pen will write in the hand of a man, but we must not receive the Gospel which was written by him as from a mortal man.

We come now to the text. *The Word*, says he, *was in the beginning*. The intention of St. John is to show us that, as the Son of God did not begin to exist when He appeared to the world, so also He did not begin only when His virtue was spread everywhere. For He already was, from all time and before all time. Already His virtue resided in Him and was not taken from elsewhere, but there was a virtue which was in the Word of God at the beginning. But finally it was manifested. We know it now since Jesus Christ was sent into the world. St. John, then, here wishes to show that when Jesus Christ came into the world, it was our Eternal God Who came, Who redeemed us to Himself.

But to still better understand the whole, we must note item by item the things said here. *The Word was in the beginning*. There is no doubt that he here calls the Son of God *the Word*. The reason is that it is the wisdom which always was in God, that is His

counsel and His virtue. Surely we have not expounded things here according as their seriousness requires. I say it even of those things propounded by St. John. For although the Spirit of God has spoken by his mouth, yet he has not yet declared things in their grandeur and majesty. It is not a derogatory remark about the Spirit of God when we say that He did not manifest entirely and in perfection the things here indicated. For the Holy Spirit accommodates Himself to our weakness. In fact, if we heard God speaking to us in His Majesty, it would be useless to us, since we would understand nothing. So, since we are carnal, He must stutter. Otherwise we would not understand Him. By that, then, we see that we must understand that God made Himself little to declare Himself to us. And if it were not so, how would it be possible to express anything of the Majesty of God by speaking the language of men? Would it not be too great a step to take? St. John, then, although he is an instrument of the Holy Spirit, does not speak of these things in their grandeur. Nevertheless, he speaks a language which is, as it were, unknown to us. Yet one must conclude that the secrets here contained are not declared so openly that we can comprehend them as we comprehend the things of this world. Let us in simplicity be content with what is here shown us. For our Lord knew what would be sufficient for our good. He accommodated Himself to us and to our weakness in such a way that He has neither forgotten nor left behind anything which might be good and profitable to us.

So let us learn to cling to the purity and simplicity of His teaching, as we see how the world in this matter has been deceived by foolish imagination, vain speculations, and diabolical audacity. For when it came to a question of treating these things men have gone beyond their depth as they have wished, beyond the revelation and doctrine, with curiosity and audacity, to inquire into the eternal essence of God, as one might hear in the Papacy, as if one were disputing about a flock of goats, and I do not know what all. They have no more reverence for God than for a beast. We need not seek better testimony against the teaching of the Sophists of the Sorbonne in order to know that the devil reigns there and always has reigned there. I say again even if their teaching were not actually false, when one sees that they have so little respect for the majesty of God, one must surely say that it is a diabolical teaching which is today practiced by the Sophists and Sorbonnists in all the colleges of the Pope. So then, (as I have said) let us be content with this simplicity which is shown us by the Holy Spirit. For He treats of what is good and useful for our salvation. As I have already declared, He has here brought out what was suitable for us to know.

Let us come now to this word "*Word*." When St. John calls Jesus Christ "*the Word*," it is as if he said, "The eternal plan of God, or the wisdom which resides in Him." However, we must note that God is not like men. When we have a plan, it can change. But not so with God. For whatever is in God's mind is unchangeable. Besides, a plan which we have does not necessarily represent our essential nature. But God's plan is really God. For God is not like a veil which casts a shadow, as in the figure of speech St. James uses. We are like a shadow that flits about and we cannot remain firm. Now nothing like that exists in God, so that whatever is in Him is of His essence and eternity. That is why St. John declares that this Word is really God.

But as for the expression (as I have already said) we must not imagine a plan or a wisdom in God like the word of men. Surely we can make some comparison with ourselves, but we must always consider the long distance which is between us and God. For if the heavens are high above the earth, we must know that God is still higher above us. There is no proportion. So, when we deduce some figure of speech from our lives as creatures, we must always note this great distance which is between God and us.

One may well say that in the soul of men there is an intelligence which is so joined to the soul that the soul cannot exist without intelligence. There is also the will. I do not mean one desire now and another desire then, but the faculty (as they say) of willing which man has in himself. For man is not like a stone or a log without sense and without reason, but he has this peculiar nature stamped upon him of willing this and that. So, then, we can certainly accept such figures of speech. However, we must remember that we are here speaking of things so high that all human sensibilities must be thrown down and that we must treat them in humility, applying them in their true sense, that we must not be too curious, that we must not have that foolish imagination which has until now prevailed in the world but that we must come to the school of God to listen to what He has to tell us and to flee every proposition of men which is contrary to what is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

However, we must also note that some, being driven by the devil, have perverted the sense of this doctrine, saying that this Word was not, apart from some plan and deliberation which God had made to redeem mankind in the person of Jesus Christ (Who was an idea, as they say, as when a man has resolved to do a piece of work which he has conceived in his mind). They do not allow eternity of essence to the Son of God in speaking thus. Now we have already seen, and we shall see still more fully, how Saint John calls Jesus Christ the Word of God to show His Deity, as I have already said. And may this be a visible testimony from God Himself. For he says that this Word was in the beginning. So He must have been eternal. To be sure, one might reply on the contrary that Moses says that in the beginning God created heaven and earth and now Saint John says that this Word was in the beginning. So it seems that, if heaven and earth and other creatures were in the beginning, one cannot prove the eternity of Jesus Christ by saying the Word was in the beginning. But the answer is easy, namely: that when Moses deals with this beginning, we must be advised how he speaks, that is, of heaven, of earth, and of other things which have a beginning.

Let us consider now what Saint John says. "*In the beginning*" (says he) "*was the Word.*" And where was this beginning? In God. And what is the beginning of God? There is none. Otherwise God would have to be a creature of our imagination. Thus when mention is made of the beginning of God, we must conclude that it is a beginning which has no time element in it. It is well, then, to compare the passage of Moses where it says that God created everything in the beginning and this passage which says, "The Word was in the beginning." For Moses deals with creatures which began to be at a certain time. Here St. John speaks only of God, who cannot be without His eternity. We must, then, conclude that this beginning has no beginning. So we see that Jesus Christ always

was. That is how Saint John said that Jesus Christ is our eternal God, Who appeared to us in the flesh, as also Saint Paul speaks of it.

Next he adds, "*this Word was with God,*" as if he said that we must separate the Word from all creatures. That is the intention of the Gospel-writer. We must not (says he) imagine that this Word has had something like creatures. We must withdraw from the world. We must ascend above earth and heaven when we think of this Word. One might perhaps ask, "Before there was heaven or earth was it possible that this Word was in the beginning?" Saint John, then, in answer separates this Word from all creatures. He might have said, "When I speak to you of this Word, you must come to God, for He is in God." Let us regard Him, then, as an Eternity Who belongs neither to creatures, nor to heaven nor to earth, nor to anything which may exist.

Nevertheless, the Gospel here makes a distinction between God and His Word. What is this distinction? It is not a distinction of essence. For he always means that this Word is God. And we must conclude, since we have only one God, and there is only one simple essence in Him, that Jesus Christ, this Eternal Word here spoken of, was not different from God His Father. Yet there is always some distinction. What is it?

Now because we cannot comprehend what is so high above all our intelligence and reason, ancient Teachers have used the word "Persons." They said that in God there were three persons, not as if we speak in ordinary language calling three men three persons, or as in the Papacy they even have the audacity to paint three grotesque pictures, and behold the Trinity! But the word "Persons" in this connection is to express the properties which are of the essence of God. The word "Substance" or (as the Greeks say) "Hypostasis" is still more suitable since it is from Holy Scripture. The Apostle uses it in the first chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews when he says that Jesus Christ is the living image, and the splendor of the glory, the image of the substance of God His Father. When he speaks there of the substance of God, he does not mean the essence. He speaks of this property which belongs to the Father: namely, that He is the Source of all things.

Now let us look at these three Hypostases, as they are called. Let us see how they agree, as much as God teaches us, as I have already said. For we must not exceed these limits, and let us pay as much attention to that as will be required for the exposition of this passage. When one speaks of God, surely men themselves are confused and do not know how to imagine Him without being led astray in their imaginations, as says Saint Paul. So it comes that they were given to too much pride for their prudence and wisdom. Yet God punishes them in such a way that they find themselves in such horrible labyrinths that they cannot get out. But when we allow God to lead us to Himself by Holy Scripture, we shall know how much God will be our Helper. For we shall come to the Father as to the source of all things. Then we shall not be able to conceive of the Father without His Counsel and Eternal Wisdom. Then there will be a virtue which resides in Him which we shall also sense clearly. That is how we shall find these three properties in the essence of God.

This is what Saint John meant by the expression "*The Word was with God.*" If there were not any distinction, he would not speak thus. For it would be speaking improperly to say, "God was with Himself." So we know that this Word has some distinction from the Heavenly Father. For this Word was begotten before time, even though God always had His plan and His wisdom. However, we must not imagine any beginning. For we must not say that God was without judgment, without plan, and wisdom. So, we must not put apart and separate from God the Property of this Word by saying that we judge that there was some time when He was not with Him. For this would make Him an idol. But as I have said, the Three are only One, and yet we must distinguish Them, since there is a definite distinction, as is here shown. However, it reminds us of a sentence of an ancient teacher, which is well worthy to be remembered, because it is excellent.

"I cannot," says he, "think upon these three properties which are shown me in God unless immediately my mind reduces them to one. On the other hand, it is impossible for me to know one only God unless I regard all the three properties, and I see them distinguished by my sense according to the clarity that is given me in Holy Scripture." That is how believers will know God. Knowing the Father, they will know His wisdom, which is this Word which is here spoken of. They will come more and more to this power which we have discussed. When they have known these three things, they will no longer go astray either this way or that way, but they will come to this sole essence — to know that there is only one God, even only one God who has so created the world that He has omitted nothing of all that was required to accomplish our redemption. That is what we must note with respect to what is said, that this Word was with God. That is, the Gospel-writer wished to separate Jesus Christ from all creatures. However, he showed us the distinction between Him and the Father.

Now he adds "*This Word was God*" to express still better what he wished to indicate, that Jesus Christ is not a created thing Who had a beginning, but He is our true God. This passage has been poorly understood by some. Someone has foolishly translated it, saying, "God is the Word." For if we said that God was the Word, the Father would no longer be God and the Holy Spirit would no longer be God. But St. John wished on the contrary to say that the Word is God, as if he said that Jesus Christ is, with respect to His Deity, of one same essence with the Father. Thus he does not exclude the Father from the Deity, but he shows that there is only one essence in God. Although there was a distinction of God from His Word, yet we must always come back to this simple proposition, that They are one God Whom we must adore. To be sure, ancient heretics have worked hard to pervert this passage so as not to be constrained to confess that Jesus Christ was our true God. But we see here that St. John speaks so dearly of the eternity of this Word that there is no place for shuffling or subterfuge.

Next he adds, "*This Word was in the beginning with God.*" He had not said these two words together. He had said, "This Word was in the beginning" and "He was with God." Now he joins the two together. That is why we must so contemplate Jesus Christ that we do not estimate that He is not true God and of the same essence with the Father. He has, to be sure, been created with respect to His human nature, but we must go

further to know Him as our eternal God, Who is in such a manner our God that He is the wisdom of His Father which has been with God from all time. That, then, is the summary of it. Now when we remember this exposition (as it is simply expressed) it will suffice to instruct us for our salvation. Surely it is all we need to know about it.

For if we come here to dispute foolishly it will happen to us (as I have already said) as it happened to the Papists. Besides, let us note that it is a foolish study to work hard to confirm what the Gospel-writer here says by the teaching of ancient Philosophers. There are people who try to do that. To be sure, in Plato one will find that there was an intelligence in God. For when he speaks of God, he says that God always had His intelligence in Himself. Almost all the other Philosophers speak in this way. Now those who are so curious as to wish thus to make the Philosophers agree with Holy Scripture think they do great service to the Christian Church when they can say that the Gospel-writers have not been the only ones who have spoken thus and that even the pagans have well known such things. It is very apropos! As though one put a veil before clear vision. Behold God Who makes Himself clear to us by the doctrine of His Gospel, and we are going to put a veil before it by saying, "Look at this! Your clearness will be still more clear."

It is very certain that God willed that these same things might be known by pagan Philosophers to render them so much more inexcusable before His Majesty. But that is not to say that His doctrine ought to be confirmed by what they have said. For the fact is that, although the more they thought they were approaching God, the further away they were straying. So is fulfilled this sentence which Saint Paul pronounces against all mankind. All those who wished to be too clever, who did not seek God in such reverence and humility as they ought, have fallen into the depth of error. And it is a just punishment from God if we come thus to pollute His doctrine, classing it among the foolish inventions of men.

Now let us pass on. The Gospel-writer says, "*All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made of all that which was made.*" After he has assured us of the eternal essence of the Word of God, he adds a confirmation to show us His eternal Deity, so that we may be more certain of everything. "*All things,*" says he, "*were made by Him.*" The essence of God is known by us, not only by what we can comprehend of Him, but also when He declared Himself to us by His creation. For when Scripture deals with it, then and there it is made visible. Not only visible, but Saint Paul goes still further, saying that, although we are blind, we can feel it by the hand. Thus when our eyes will have closed, we can know this power of God. And how so? Since it is inside us. In whom do we live and move and have our substance? In God, Who has breathed life into us, and by Whom we subsist. That is what Saint John shows us by saying that all things were made by Him.

So, we know that the Word of God has been from the beginning, Who is our God. And how do we know that? Certainly we could not reach so high. And yet God has descended to us, even God with His Word, in such a way that we can know

Him, although our senses do not extend so far and we cannot ascend above the clouds, we are constrained to know that this Word is really God. How so? Because all things were made by Him. So it is in Him that all things have been. The Apostle to the Hebrews puts it, "Let us confess that the Word of God is eternal." Why so? Because by this Word all things were made. Saint Paul also says in the 17th chapter of Acts (Acts 17) that God did not manifest Himself without ample testimony in order that we may be able to see Him in all His creation. Thus, since all things were made by His Word, we must know that He is our eternal God. There are some heretics who imagine that the Word of God had a beginning at the creation of the world, because the Word was never spoken of until the world was created. As Moses says, "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light," etc. They wish to infer by that that the Word began then. Really? On the contrary, we must rather conclude from that that the Word is eternal. For if a man begins to do something, that does not say that he did not previously exist. If that is the cause with respect to creatures, is it not even more true with respect to God?

So then, although the Word of God did not pour out His power before the creation of the world, that does not say that He did not exist before. That is what Saint John means by this manner of speaking, that is, when he says, "All things were made by this Word." Besides, let us note that when mention is made of God the Father and of His Word, we say then that all things are made by God and through His Word, and this word "*Word*" is attributed only to Jesus Christ. To be sure, when we are speaking simply of God without distinction of Persons, we may well say that all things are by and through God. But when there is some distinction as in this passage, this is the property that belongs to Jesus Christ, that "all things are made through Him." This is the distinction of Persons that I have mentioned: that all things are from God the Father, but Jesus Christ is the means.

That is what Saint John intended. It is as if he said, "God through His Word made all things." God, then, declares that He is the source of them, and all things had to be made by Him, through the means and in the power of His Word. *And without Him nothing was made of that which was made.* Saint John thus repeats this sentence, not only on account of his manner of saying the same thing in two different ways, but because of the ingratitude of men. For although one tells them that all things are made by God through His Word they do not apprehend it. We see that the creatures of God do not touch us to the quick and that we are so stupid and so gross in our senses that we cannot comprehend things as they are proposed to us.

Saint John, then, to better express it to us, adds, "*Without Him nothing was made of that which was made.*" As if he said, "And how unhappy we are if we do not receive this eternal Word of God, since through Him we were created. That is, that the world was made, the heaven, the stars, and the earth which produces our nourishment. Briefly, all good things have been given to us by means of this Word. Thus, then, when we see that our life proceeds from Him, we must cling only to Him and reject everything that one may propose to us to the contrary. There is a double exposition, according to the position of the words. Not that they are changed, but they are treated differently. Some read thus,

“Through this Word all things were made, and without Him nothing was made,” and they finish the sentence there. Then they add, “All that was made was life in Him.” But that declaration is not proper. To be sure, the sense that they put into it is a very good one. For they have the same exposition as we have. But it is a strange way of speaking. For it is not said of creatures that they are life, but that is attributed to God. As says Saint Paul to the Romans, “The Spirit is life, because of the freedom which was given to us through Jesus Christ.” In brief, when we look all through Holy Scripture, never is it said that we are life in ourselves, but that God Himself alone has life, not only spiritual life, but the life from which all things have their being, and by which we live, and that we have life and breath in Him, as I have already shown from the passage from St. Paul.

So, we see the truth of this sentence, that nothing of all that was made was made without the Word of God. This is the order of reading which has been found in all the more ancient Greek teachers and other expositors. There was none who did not thus expound it. However, we have to note that the Manicheans wished to pervert this passage (saying, “All that was made in Him was life”) to prove their foolish opinions, that all creatures are living — rocks, trees, wheat, barley. All that, according to their imagination, was living, so that they did not dare to eat bread unless they were previously sanctified by God. And why not? “It must be God who eats this thing,” they said. The devil possessed them, and yet they brought forward passages of Scripture, and abused them to prove their foolish speculations. I certainly wanted to mention this in passing to show that the devil has always tried to pervert Holy Scripture. Be that as it may, if we are seeking the truth of God we shall find it pure and simple. The devil will never be able to contrive anything against it to turn us away from it, since it is shown before our eyes, and it will be our own fault if we do not see it in its purity just as God has revealed it to us.

Let us come now to the natural sense. After Saint John said, “Nothing was made of that which was made, without this Word,” he adds, “*In Him is life.*” Here he wishes to indicate two different things. That is, that as everything was once created by the power of the Word of God, also all things remain and are preserved by this power and by this same means. There are two things we must properly consider. One, that we have beginning and life through this Word. The other, that we are sustained through Him — and not only we, but all the world. Not only was the world in the beginning created through this Word, but also it would no longer exist unless it were preserved in this same condition and by this same means. Therefore (as I have said), let us remember well these two things here pointed out by Saint John.

In the first place, then, he declares to us that nothing of that which was made, was made without this Word. How so? Does he wish to except anything that was not made? It seems that he wishes to say that the Angels were not created. No, no. It is not that, but he wishes to show that we have nothing which does not depend upon God and which has not its being in Him. Surely the Angels have a very noble nature. Nevertheless they exist through this Word, and are established in Him. Otherwise they could not endure. As also there is nothing in the world which is not preserved through this same Word.

Here we are admonished, of what poverty there would be in us unless God sustained us by His grace. That is why the Psalmist says that as soon as God withdraws His Spirit from us, there we are as dust, and entirely vanished. To be sure, he speaks there of creatures and things corporal. But we also see that all the rest also is surely sustained through the power of this Word. Although we must subsist through the Word of God, we must note that by means of Him we began to have life. And who declares it to us? The Gospel-writer. It is after all what the Apostle says in the first chapter of Hebrews. "The Son of God is the splendor of the glory or the image of the substance of God His Father and He sustains all things by His word." He uses there the word "*Word*," but with such a meaning that he intends not only the power of the Son of God, but also an admirable arrangement and a well-defined order which He has put into created things, since He is the Wisdom of God. And we can behold Him in all creatures, because he sustains all things through His virtue and power. That, then, is how we have life and movement, and after having fed upon it today, we continue, that is, as long as God preserves us. For on our own power alone we might have perished any minute, unless the Word of God maintained us. That is the sense in which the Gospel-writer says "This Word was life." Not only were all things made by Him, but they must be established upon Him and He maintains them in their being.

Next he adds, "*The life was the light of men.*" And why does he add this? For two reasons. The first is that after we have known the power of God and the virtue of His Word everywhere above and below, we must consider our relationship to it all. For it is surely reasonable that what touches us more closely we contemplate with greater diligence. How so? I ought to know the goodness of God in His preserving horses and oxen. So David tells us, saying that He gives nourishment to every beast. I see on the other hand the earth which by the commandment of God produces her fruits. If I look, then, at the beasts, I ought to know the goodness of God, which is shown even toward donkeys and dogs, but much more toward me. God comes even in that to make me feel His virtue. He gives me the bread by which I am nourished. And must I not be deeply moved by so many benefits? It is certain. For also when one considers the works of God he speaks especially of men, for God declares His virtue more greatly and more excellently in us than in other creatures.

God, then, surely wishes to be magnified both in heaven and on earth, and in all His works which we see, but much more in man, because He has stamped His image upon us more than upon all other creatures. For He has not said of the sun, of the stars, nor of any other creature however excellent it may be, "I will to make here a masterpiece who is to be in My image and likeness." So, then, the Gospel-writer, having spoken of the virtue of the Word of God, which extends to all creatures, comes to men. By that he shows that if men contemplate the goodness of God by everything they behold, surely they must consider it in their own persons. Although God has done us the honor to be magnified in us so that even the pagans have called man a little world, because one sees in him a masterpiece which surmounts all others. There is good reason for us to know in him the virtue and the power of God. To be sure, we can contemplate God in all His creatures, but when He manifests Himself in man, then we see Him, as it were, by the face. When

we consider Him in other creatures we see Him obscurely and, as it were, by the back. So, although it may be said that God is made visible in other creatures, in them we see, as it were, only His feet, His hands, and His back. But in man we see, as it were, His face. Not that it should be His face so that we contemplate Him in perfection. I do not mean that. For I do not speak of things divine, but only of what God wishes to be known in this world above and below.

That, then, is the sum what St. John says, that "*the life was the light of men.*" As if he said, "Certainly there is a life which was poured out upon all creatures. And what life? As all things are made and preserved through the Word of God. However, there is something more excellent in man, that is, soul, intelligence, and reason. For a man will not be insensible like a stone. He will not be without sense and reason as the beasts. But he has a more excellent life, to contemplate the things which are beyond the world.

Now he adds consequently, "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.*" He mentions this especially, because the light which God put in man is almost entirely extinguished. In fact, if we judge according to what we can now see in mortal men, we shall not estimate very highly the grace of God. For although man has been created in the image of God, he has been disfigured by sin. What, then, do we see in men? We see there an image of God which is wholly deformed and spoiled, since the devil has soiled it by sin. But although men following what Satan suggested have extinguished the brightness of God, however, the devil has not been able to do so much by his craftiness that this brightness of God did not still shine in the midst of darkness. That is what Saint John wishes to show. As if he said, "It is true, my little ones, that if what was originally given to men had remained in them, we would now see only the glory of God shining everywhere, instead of what we do see — that His image is so disfigured. Still it is true, however, that we may yet perceive some brightness of God left there and some spark of His light. That is what the Gospel-writer wished to indicate. I omit other things, because time does not permit us to speak of them further, and already I have spoken too long. Nevertheless, we must note that men have enough light of knowledge of God to be convicted and rendered inexcusable before God. We may make believe what we will, but God pronounces that we are darkness. And how so? Let us not attribute that to God, but to our vice. Now God must enlighten us by His brightness. Otherwise there would be nothing but darkness in us, and we would surely trip if we wished to walk a pace forward without His leading. And yet it is true (as I have already said) God has not left us so destitute that we are entirely abandoned by Him so that none of His gifts remain in us. And that it may be so, there is some semblance of religion in men. They still have relics of their original creation. So we see even in the most wicked and depraved there is some impression of the image of God. That makes us all the more inexcusable. Inasmuch as they will not have made use of it, their condemnation will be all the heavier. It will be doubly heavy. That, then, is how, although our nature has been so corrupted, yet we still retain some spark of the grace which God had put in our father Adam. So this sentence is true, "*The light shines in darkness.*"

However, the Gospel-writer says, "*The darkness comprehended it not.*" By which he shows the ingratitude of men. God makes His light to shine in us. His Word shines there. However, we obscure that light by our wickedness. To be sure, the Gospel itself is to us a declaration and a manifestation of this light. But still the wickedness and ingratitude which are in us would entirely extinguish the light in us, unless God remedied it by all infinite power and goodness. That is what Saint John wishes to show in this place. However, he begins to prepare us for what he will say later: that is, the purpose for which this Word (Who is Jesus Christ) was sent to us by God His Father. It is that He might be manifest to us in the flesh for our salvation. He wishes, then, to show the mystery of our redemption and how we needed it when he says, "*We have not comprehended the light* which was in us." As if he said, "It would not have been profitable to have the light which shines in us, unless we had been so wonderfully redeemed and this Word had fulfilled the love of God toward us to restore His image which had been blotted out by our sin and entirely disfigured in the first man."

That is how (say I) Saint John wishes to prepare us to know the effect of our redemption. Then he also wished to show how the Word of God declares Himself in His creatures, since all things are preserved by His power. However, he exhorts us to know the graces God has given us, by which we excel other creatures, so that we magnify Him. Besides, to know that, since He has imprinted on us His living image from the beginning and He makes us to experience His power, it is only reasonable that we should learn to cling to this Word and to know in general, the benefits God has given to mankind, in order that the light He has poured upon us by His grace may not be extinguished by our wickedness, but that Jesus Christ may so dwell in the midst of us that, being led by the Holy Spirit, we may be able to have such access to the Father that He may introduce us into His heavenly glory.

Now I have treated things as briefly as was possible for me, always hoping to attain the object which was before the Gospel-writer. However, if I have omitted something because I could not remember everything, let each one of you say what God has revealed to him about it. And if there is any doubt let him suggest the things, so that declaring them they may be explained, and so that the Church of God may be fully edified by it when things do not remain in doubt, but they are understood according to their true sense, after they shall have been appropriately discussed and according to God.