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Fate, Faith, and Freedom Monday, October 24, 2005 7:00 p.m. Adult Formation/Spiritual Life presentation

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
I would like to read from the prologue of the fourth gospel.

^{1 2} In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
³ All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be
through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race;
⁴ the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
⁵ A man named John was sent from God.
He came for testimony, ⁶ to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.
He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.
The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own, but his own people ⁷ did not accept him.
But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name,
⁸ who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.
And the Word became flesh ⁹ and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.
¹⁰ John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'"
From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, ¹¹
because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, ¹² who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.
The Gospel of the Lord. (Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.)

My purpose in speaking to you this evening is to help you **reflect on our faith and to answer certain questions** that have come to me from time to time. First of all, they come to me because I think them, and, secondly, they come to me because people ask them.

Now the actual origin of this talk started last December when the tsunami hit—you will recall the tsunami before Katrina and before Wilma and before these others—the tsunami. People said to me, "Why does God allow a tsunami, or why

does God cause a tsunami, or why does God make tsunamis? Those kinds of questions! I really think they are legitimate questions because they are actually **trying to seek an answer.**

Now last Thursday the children from our public schools were here in church, and they were asking questions. They were good questions. The problem is they really weren't able to understand too much of the answer, but that's what human beings are. Human beings are those beings who wonder about things, and their wonderment is not limited to what they can understand. So **we do wonder about things that we cannot explain. And even if an explanation were given, often we won't grasp it.** But that doesn't matter; the wondering is important. It's important we wonder. It's important that we question.

So we begin with the great question from all time: **Why is there something rather than nothing?** No one has ever answered this question. We have to realize the fact that we are here, that we are in existence, is a mystery. **It is a mystery! We need to wonder about it!**

Ancient philosophers usually came to a conclusion through reason. They looked at life as they observed it, and they saw that **all material things come and go.** All living things are born, and then they die. Even mountains are created by various forces, and then they are worn down. That is an observation they made. Therefore, they deduced that what we see in the framework of time, what we see that comes and goes, the temporal world, **the material world, must depend upon something more substantial.**

Now they never proved this. That's not a matter of proving. How would you prove something like this? But they came to that conclusion. It suited their sense of reason, their sense of what was fitting. But **they didn't know what this "more substantial" was.** They thought about it. They wondered about it. They imagined about it. But they really didn't know for sure much about it.

That's where the gospel comes in because **in our faith tradition we believe that the mystery of life, the source of life, has revealed itself to us.** The disclosure of God—that's what we mean by revelation—God disclosing himself.

See, the word "God," of course, is not an answer to any question. Some people think, oh, that's how you answer the question: Why is there anything? **God made it. That is not an answer! God is simply a name or a word we give to the mystery.** So saying something like that really is not answering anything. We have to keep that in mind.

Now recently a girl came to me. She said, "I don't know if this is a sin, but I don't believe in God." I said, "Well, I don't know—if there is no God, then there is no sin either—is there?" Well, of course, she is very confused; and that's fine. We do get confused. But it's an issue because she and I talked for a few minutes

about this whole idea of: well, **where did things come from?** Where does anything come from? **There is no real answer to that; that's part of the mystery.** You can start to reduce, go backward, and say, well, everything came from this, which came from that, which came from that. But then you get back to a point, and then what an atheist will say, "And who made God?" You get back to the point, well, God made it—but who made God? So that's no answer. So we have to realize we are dealing with mystery here.

The mystery, however, has come to us and revealed himself. We say "himself" because **the mystery reveals itself as some consciousness, some conscious being.** So we personalize it because in English "it" would sound too much like a thing. God is no more a him than a her, or "he" than a "she."

Now what the early philosophers were observing is what we call "contingency." **Contingency means that things don't have to be the way they are, they are not necessarily so.** They are the way they are, but they don't have to be the way they are—contingency.

The Arab philosophers, oddly enough, often thought that things had to be the way they were. Some of the Enlightenment philosophers thought that this had to be the best of all possible worlds. That was their opinion, but that's not really what our faith says.

Our faith says only one thing is necessary—God. God is the one necessary being. So we have to think about this now: that there is only one necessary reality. Everything that exists, just as this gospel says, comes into being through God. **Everything depends upon God.** The dependence is not something in the past. **The dependence is always.** Everything always depends upon God.

Now this dependence is what we call the "creation." **Everything that is not God is created.** The part of creation we live in is called "**material creation,**" and it **happens to have a framework which is both spatial and temporal.** We do not exist in a world without time or space. Our thinking and our imagination tends to be based on the necessity of having time and space, but **time and space really belong to only one aspect of reality—the created aspect of reality. Time and space does not belong to God.**

There is another interesting thing about some modern cosmologists. They will say that the big bang—you are probably familiar with that idea, the big bang—the big bang emerged from a vacuum, a random fluctuation in a vacuum. The problem with that idea is a vacuum already presupposes space, and space is a framework for us to think in. Our imagination always has space. But, technically, space really belongs to the material world, and so we also have to say that **at the big bang space itself was created as well as time.** Our minds want to imagine: well, **what was before that? The answer is nothing—not space and not time.**

Eternity does not mean on and on and on and on. Eternity means all-present. **God is eternal because God is all-present and always present with no past or future.**

These ideas are not easy for us to grasp, but **the more we really reflect on them, the more we will be elevated.** Our minds will be elevated and enriched. So it is with this idea that I share some of these thoughts.

Now I said that the creation is contingent, which it is. **All creation is contingent because God does not have to create.** God is not obliged to create. He is not compelled to create. This was one of the basic decrees of the Archbishop of Paris right in the time of Thomas Aquinas. He was speaking against some of the ideas of the Arab philosophers, who thought that things had to be the way they are. There are others besides them. But the point is he said, “No, the world is contingent. God did not have to create it. **God created everything out of nothing—freely—because he wanted to.**” That’s the idea of contingency. So St. Thomas’ philosophy is all based on that idea, which, of course, is also our Scripture.

But **there are different degrees of contingency**—there are different degrees of contingency. So if we imagine—I am going to do something terrible—I am going to start writing, which is bad, really, because **when we write, we are going to be limiting** and we are going to be concretizing words; and, you see, that’s not really good. But we have to do it! But just don’t ever take anything too seriously. Play—you have to play with ideas—**play with ideas.**

So if we start with **God**, the only necessary being—it’s just a name we are giving for **the one single necessary being, which happens to be eternal.** Necessary and eternal go together. Now **God is the creator and the source and the ground of all else. But God does not necessarily create everything in the same way.** This is where revelation becomes helpful, and also the teaching of our Church in a very, very pertinent way.

For example, the Church says that **when God creates a human person, the core of that person is created in a relatively necessary way.** It’s not necessary like this (pointing to the word “God”), which means uncreated and eternal. So the core of a human person is not eternal or uncreated but, nonetheless, **shares somewhat in the nature of God.** That is why we say that a human person is **an image and a likeness of God**, because **at the core of a human person there is something that must be, that is willed by God to be exactly that way.** We could call it an “identity.” So there is a **core identity** that does not come from the environment or the family, but is willed by God. This is a teaching of our Church, and it is a beautiful teaching. If you think about it, it shows that **every human person has a dignity.** It’s not given by the family. It’s not given by a society. It’s not given by the government. It’s not given by anything. **It is there because God wills it to be.**

However, **God does not will every aspect of a human person to the same degree.** Therefore, while it is true of every human person being necessarily desired by God just as is, nonetheless, it doesn't mean that every aspect of our lives is therefore, as it were, in the same necessity or in the same boat, so to speak. But as we look at our entire being, and we have great, you might say, spectrum of being, of being-ness, much of us, **much of what makes us up, is not so determined by God. And so it becomes more and more contingent.** Now there are different varieties of every individual person because God has a different idea for each one. So at the core there is this idea, which is also the identity.

But there is **more in us than our identities.** Just take the obvious: hair color, and eyes, and looks. You see children and they have their mother's nose and their father's ears or the jaw of the father and the gate of the mother—whatever. **We are a composite**—we are a composite of our parents, or an aunt or uncle or someone else. Or maybe something is rather unique. **That's all this contingency at work.**

That's why we can accept, for example, the **idea of evolution** to some degree. It makes perfect sense because we see how **God does not determine ahead of time or in any necessary way how things turn out** but, rather, allows for contingency.

Before we talk about going any further about this, I want to point out that between God and the human person there is, of course, an entire—what? Universe. So I just took the human person as an example of how we can see there is something necessary about us, but there is a lot that is not necessary the way it is. You understand this difference? You are getting this idea? Contingency?

If we look at **the whole universe**, there is something that is very remarkable about it, and that is that it **corresponds to a great degree with mathematical formulas.** Now here is a good question. Is mathematics discovered or invented? What do you think? I think it has to be discovered. But if mathematics is discovered, it means behind this world of mathematics that we are discovering **there is a mind that is grand enough to include the entire universe**, which is, after all, mathematical. **That to me is a reflection of the mind of God.**

Now **the whole issue of mathematics and also the wholeness, the order that is found in the whole of the universe**, this is something I want to focus on for a moment. I am going to use an example of an automobile. I think by using the idea of an automobile I might be able to explain something about the way we find out about life. The way we find out about life should tell us something about life—at least that's my guess!

Now what does the word “**automobile**” actually mean? Auto—self—mobile—a self-moving vehicle. Now that is what we call an idea. That's an idea, or you

could even call it a “concept.” Sometimes an idea is bigger than a concept, but that’s really either one. Okay, **an idea or a concept.**

Now, actually, **ideas are abstract.** If you think right now about automobiles, you think about the idea of an automobile—it’s abstract. There is no such thing existing in reality as an automobile. There are many different individual automobiles. Lexises and Fords and other cars—individual automobiles, and those are particular things. And they are real. But my claim is **the idea is just as real, but it’s abstract.**

Furthermore, you cannot understand an automobile by taking it apart. This is what I think is a problem with a great deal of our modern Western approach to reality. **We are always taking everything apart.** So if you talk to physicists you hear about quarks and electrons and leptons and neutrons and protons and forces. Well, is that really telling us about physical reality? It’s telling us about what parts are in there. So if I took an automobile apart, and I showed you all the different parts—the brakes and the carburetor and all this stuff—and lined them up on the floor, that would not actually tell you what an automobile is. This is really what we are doing when we are constantly analyzing everything. We have a very **analytic culture.** Our intellectual culture is very analytic, almost to the point of reducing everything to the smallest possible thing. My contention is **we are never going to understand the whole when we do this.** It’s a fine thing to do, but we can’t stop there.

Secondly, the idea of the automobile actually had to come first because no one ever could have made an automobile without thinking about what he wanted to make. So **you have to have the idea first.** It seems to me, that in this way, **we are like God, in that, if we want to make something, we have to have an idea of it first.** I would claim that before God makes anything, before anything is created, God has to have an idea of it. I believe this refers to what is often misunderstood, but Jesus says, **“With God are all possibilities.”** I believe that means that in God’s mind exist all possibilities, **only some of which actually become created in time and space.**

Now there is absolutely no reason why we should deny the possibility of other universes. Some speculate there are other universes. There may be; there may not be. That’s very possible. There is no reason to say it can’t be. But whatever universes come about, come about because **God has chosen out of his ideas to make some of them.** However, that does not mean that with God everything is possible—see? **“With God are all possibilities” does not mean that with God everything is possible,** which is often what people say. **That’s where they get into the problem when thinking about the issue of freedom.** Now have I confused you at this point?

So in trying to understand our universe, I think we have to realize that **tearing it apart and looking into every individual piece is not really going to reveal**

the whole meaning and purpose of the whole. But we have to have an idea, and **the idea is going to really be in the mind of God, and we may or may not be able to glean it in our experience. That's where, of course, we are very fortunate to have revelation.**

Now I'd like to talk about the whole idea of freedom. This is where the **question comes in—freedom and fate and divine control.** Going back to the idea that **God creates the world in various degrees of contingency,** not only the human person, but the whole world, the whole world will share in various degrees of contingency, which means that actually God is giving a certain sort of **freedom to the world to be various ways.**

This is why actually the idea of evolution is not bad at all, because **evolution is simply describing a certain kind of development, provided that you have an idea in the first place.** The problem with certain thinkers today is that they want to talk about evolution as if the development takes place with no idea first.

Now that is not Darwin's idea. **Darwin himself believed that in the beginning God created either, he says, "a being or several beings,"** and they then evolved into all the different life forms we see. But he said, "The creator"—he used that word, creator—"The creator formed initially a being or several," he says. But modern Neodarwinists don't say that. Modern Neodarwinists want to believe that through chance, through randomness, inorganic matter just started becoming organic. In fact, that's what the girl told me: "Inorganic matter just becomes organic." That is, matter that cannot reproduce all of a sudden starts reproducing! That's what organic means—it just starts reproducing, and then it just changes randomly! So **the idea that it changes randomly is not necessarily wrong.** That is very possible. But we have to go back to the idea. **It's got to be changing toward some idea.** Even if you look at the human race and all the variations, nonetheless, there is something substantially the same.

Now in regard to a gambling casino— **I think a gambling casino can show us something about how God operates.** A gambling casino is all made up of various random games: card shuffling, roulette wheels, dice throwing. **In every single game there is chance at work.** Now not all philosophers and theologians have always agreed with this. John Calvin forbade people to play cards because he didn't believe that there was any sort of contingency. He thought everything was necessary, that God determined everything. John Calvin, therefore, did not believe in free will. He thought God determined everything. He said, "Don't play cards because when you play cards, you are tempting God because he has got to decide every time when you flip a card what it is going to be."

If you think about Isaac Newton's basic ideas, he does not allow for any contingency either in his universe. Everything has to be the way it is. Everything depends upon something else, depending upon something else, depending on something else, in a great chain of cause and effect, which doesn't allow for any

sort of leeway. That's the way he thought. Many scientists have thought that way. They are called "**determinists,**" **that is, they think everything is determined, whether they believe in God or not.** Newton did believe in God. He thought God ultimately was the original determiner of everything. Actually you can have atheists who are determinists, who think the universe is all determined so that everything that happens, happens because something else has happened. There is no leeway. There is no room. In this way **we need to welcome the idea of randomness and the idea of contingency, because it opens a door in which human freedom can operate.**

Now go back to the casino. We have all these little games and they are all random. However, the idea that the casino may or may not make money is not true! The contingency is this: **if people come to the casino with money, the owners will make money.** They will profit. There is no doubt about that. It's not a fifty-fifty deal. It's not sixty-forty. It's for sure! If they bring money, the owners will make money. That's why people build casinos.

Now I think that is a way in which we can understand evolution: that **God allows all kinds of random movements and actions, but as an owner of a casino, he knows that eventually the idea he has will work its way out.** He will profit. He will profit from this arrangement. You do not have to eliminate freedom or randomness or chance in order to have purpose. They are not opposites. **Purpose can work its way out through randomness provided you have an idea first.**

(Question: Is it true if you reject the contingency, you reject the idea?) Well, the idea of contingences is that things don't have to be the way they are. You could have a world where there is no contingency, where everything is in lockstep. But—this is my contention—in that kind of world there could be no freedom of any kind. Free will would mean nothing. So God could make a world like that. But I don't think God could do everything. That's why I said, "**All possibilities are with God, but that doesn't mean everything is possible to God.**" So people say, for example, **why does God allow evil,** or why does God allow hurricanes, or why does God allow tsunamis, or why does God allow crimes? The ultimate answer is because **God wants people to be free. He has created a world of contingency where freedom will work and where people can make a contribution to the outcome of an idea or to the outcome of the whole, you know, by participating in the idea, you might say—by participating in the plan. So freedom is really only meaningful because things are not all determined.** Some things are determined like the dignity of a human person, but many things are left undetermined, and that is why what we do means something. We do something, and **we do make the world to be a certain way, and it is a product of our choices.** Now to me this is rather obvious, and yet philosophically many have denied it. I don't want to get into why they do, but they have done this.

But now do we realize that then **the actual existence of contingency and freedom means also that there is evil in the world.** Why? Because if I am not obliged to do good, if I am free to do good or do evil, well, then there must be evil because at some point people are going to choose not to do good, and that would be evil. If God willed a world where people have freedom, then he wills a world where there is evil. And, furthermore, if you look at the idea of contingency, it's not only voluntary evil, which we call moral evil, but **even physical evil is included.** Go back to the idea of the idea. What is DNA but an idea in a physical form? And what is reproduction but the copying of the form? Now if we lived in a world that was lockstep, where every copy was absolutely perfect, that would be a world where our freedom could not operate. A world where our freedom could operate has to allow for the possibility that the copies are not always going to be correct! That means, at times, spina bifida! That means birth defects! That means cancer! That means all kinds of physical defects! Why? Because the world itself is not being controlled by necessity.

Now could God make a world in which there is absolute freedom and no evil? I don't believe so. Now people say, "What about heaven?" Well, see, **heaven is a place where you are free to do what you have already chosen.** That's what St. Thomas says about choice. He says, "The human will, the human soul, is incarnate in a human body and must choose through the body. And when you die, you no longer make a new choice." There are people who don't agree with this, but he says that. Now to me that makes sense.

As far as this idea that if God knows everything, you have to keep in mind that **God does not know things in a temporal mode but in an eternal mode,** if you want to use that expression. I know a parent said to me, "Listen, I know what my teenage kid is going to do, but that doesn't mean that I make him do it!" But I don't want to get into that right now. Maybe we can a little bit later, but I want to move more into the idea of how we now live in this world where mistakes can be made, where sins can be committed—sins being moral mistakes. There are physical mistakes. There are moral mistakes. There are metaphysical mistakes too—we don't want to get into that.

We can talk a little bit about the whole idea of the soul. When we talk about the **core of the person one word we use is "soul."** Now what do we mean by a soul? The English word actually comes from the Icelandic word that comes from the sea. The idea was life came from the sea. So if we say soul has life, we are pretty close.

In the Bible there are some Hebrew words for soul. *Nephesh* is a word used in Scripture for **soul.** *Nephesh* has more than one meaning, and I want to talk about all of them. There are actually **three meanings for nephesh.** The first means "**experience.**" So you read this in the psalms: "In the depths of my soul I cry to you"—in the depths of my experience. Now there is a book written recently which says, "Well, do we need to talk about a soul, because really those are just

brain functions?” Well, maybe what we talk about as brain functions are very similar to what we talk about as a soul, but I want to point out to you that the human experience is still a tremendous mystery. We can study the brain and you can study synapses and neurons. You can study all kinds of things about the brain, but it is still a wonder how those operations end up in what we see and hear and taste. Human experience is still something that is remarkable. It’s not simply the mechanical product of the brain. The brain is doubtlessly involved. So is the liver and so are the kidneys and so are the lungs and the rest of us, because, as St. Thomas says, **we experience through our bodies. But experience itself is something somehow more than just that.** And that is indicated by the word “soul.”

Secondly, **identity**. Who are you? That is indicated by the word *nephesh* in Hebrew. In fact, when a person dies and they put up the burial marker, they sometimes call that a *nephesh* because it says, “This was Joe Doe.” So that’s his identity. So *nephesh*—soul.

There is a third meaning, and that has to do with **the quality of life I have**. I was just reading a proverb the other day and it said, “A lying mouth slays the soul—a lying mouth slays the soul.” So it has to do with a quality of living, a quality of probity, a quality of honesty. That’s soul, now, that whole reality of soul.

It’s not a thing. We have to realize that when we are talking about human life we are not just talking about a thing. It’s not something that comes and goes. It’s a quality of who we are. It’s an experience we have—the soul. It’s an identity that tells us who we are. So don’t be thinking always in terms of things. **A word like soul is really inviting us to probe more deeply. It is very directly connected to this very core of our personhood.**

(Are all souls created equal?) I wouldn’t use the word equal. I think **all souls are created totally unique and different.** Are all souls created equal? Well, I don’t know what equality would mean in a spiritual world—equal worth, equal dignity—but all different, all individual, distinct and individualized. So that’s the “who” part.

There is another word in Hebrew, *ruah*—means breath, really; and it’s related to the word soul, although you would translate it more properly “spirit.” The whole idea of *ruah* is a very beautiful idea. What the **Hebrews thought was that all living things are really living with God’s own breath.** When you see life, you are seeing the breathing of God. Then when something dies it is because God takes his breath back. Again, it’s not some thing! It’s a participation in an energy and a flow of life. That’s what spirit refers to.

These two ideas go very much to the very core of human personhood and to a reality that is not separated from our physical nature, but is different from it. So

we should **think of ourselves as layers of being**, not one opposed to the other: the matter versus the spirit, but **as different aspects that cannot be reduced to any simple measurement**. So, again, if we are going to be reductive in our thinking, I think we are going to miss the beauty of our tradition and of our spirituality.

Finally, when we talk about St. Thomas, he uses the word “*anima*.” This word *anima*—you might think it looks like “animal”—but *anima* is really a **combination of these ideas**. He meant **the life force that made something live**. He would use the word *anima* for all living things, living things that he would understand—not bacteria. He did not understand bacteria as a living thing. But any living thing he would see he would say had an *anima*, **a life, an identity, and a quality**. But he would not think, as the Bible thinks, in terms of quality of life: the goodness of your life or the worth of your life. But St. Thomas as a philosopher thought more in terms of what kind of life is this. So he put all this together in the word *anima*—life, identity, experience—and then form and pattern.

Form and pattern. Now when we get to **form and pattern, we are getting back to the idea of idea**, the pattern, the idea, **what something is, what something is becoming**. What something is becoming—so we are really not static beings, but we are growing beings. So we are growing into something. **The soul, the *anima*, is really leading us in our development.**

If we want to think about the whole universe in that way, I think it might be helpful that **the whole world is really being led to something**. I think that is what Jesus called the “**kingdom of heaven**,” that we are being led to **some kind of new level of existence**, new kind of existence, **new quality of existence**.

Now how does this all take place? **It takes place through human agency**—through human agency—not through automobiles. That is a human agency, too, but that’s not what I am talking about. **This is how God influences us freely**. That is the idea of grace.

Now St. Thomas—and I follow him pretty much in this area—**St. Thomas believed that human nature** itself, the very idea of human nature, the thing we all share together, is basically good. Now not all theologians agreed with him. Calvin said that human nature was depraved. That was an idea found sometimes in the reformed theologians, that it was depraved. But St. Thomas did not say human nature was depraved. He said that it **was basically good, although wounded by sin**.

Now how is God going to influence us? He says that there are two chief ways. He says that first of all, since nature is good, **nature can itself actually desire or have a tendency to want to do what is good**. He says in that case God comes to nature, nature’s aid, in what he called *gratia co-operans*—grace cooperating. So **God comes to us to aid our weakness when we have an intention, an insight, a desire, that is good and**

wholesome. But God does not simply wait for us to have these sorts of good ideas. God actually will come and plant ideas in our heads, if you want to put it that way. **He will bring ideas.** He will bring insight. He will even bring desires into our hearts. St. Thomas called that *gratia operans*—grace operant.

Now if you think about this for a moment, God is the origin of everything, God has willed a universe with various levels of contingency, at the center of our lives is something he really desires: an image and likeness of himself with tremendous capacity, with identity, with a capacity to experience, with intelligence and freedom, and **God, now, is going to influence us** through our intelligence, through our insights, through our desires and freedom. He is going to nurture holy desires. He is going to do this **in such a way that we are free to reject it.** Why? Because **the world is constructed in such a way that the influences are not necessary.** God's will is not determining everything. So he can influence us in such a way that **if we accept the influence, then actually it's God's work, but if we reject it, that's our work.** So God can work through us and do his work through our hands and our hearts and our minds—it's really God working, provided we surrender to him, to his grace. But when we reject his grace, then God has nothing to do with that. **He has simply allowed a world in which that's possible.**

So now with that I think we can start to think about all the things we experience in life. **What does God really do, and what does God really permit?** I think what Catholics need to do is think about this in their own way and develop a way of thinking about it, because every single day these things are at work. **Every single day God is addressing us in grace.** Every single day things are happening that go against God's purpose. But this is allowed to happen because if God didn't allow it, then we could never accept anything freely either. It is tragic what really goes on, as we know, not only just recent things like hurricanes, which are actually minor, but the terrible diseases that people endure. That is terrible. But it is a world in which we can be free, in which we can make a difference. I am not simply saying that, well, we can find a cure. That's a later, more distant consequence. I'm saying that **the fact that everything isn't already predetermined gives latitude for us to act.**

(Question about intelligent design.) **If intelligent design means that there is an idea behind everything that is evolving, I agree with it.** But, unfortunately, that's usually not what it means. Usually what they want to say is that in the actual analysis of every step along the way, God is intervening in a supernatural way. That is not my understanding of how God works. We do not say that miracles are impossible. **Miracles are possible. But we don't want to say that the world depends upon supernatural miracles for it to continue.** I don't think that would be correct. I don't think that would be Catholic thinking. So the trouble with intelligent design is it gives the impression—now I am not sure they all think this way, but I have heard people say they think this way—that without supernatural interventions at certain points, the world would just fall apart. Well, no. I think rather that God has created everything precisely in such a way as it won't fall apart, even though he allows for randomness, and so on.

The whole idea of the brain is fascinating. Our brain is a very complex organ. It happens to be divided into two hemispheres. The right hemisphere in most people tends to be more intuitive in seeing a whole, and the left is more analytic. It's no secret that the Western culture is very analytic, that we live in a very analytic culture, that we are always focusing on parts more than the whole. But I think that the tendency of this school of thought, called "Intelligent Design" is trying to find God present in the little details, which probably is not a very good idea. Hugh of St. Victor said that God exists in such a way that those who want to find him will find him; and those who don't want to find him will not find him. So I think that excludes intelligent design.

(What is so great about freedom? Why does a loving God give us freedom to reject? Why don't we have to choose the right path?) I would say that that's just not the way God wants to be because, I think, God wants people to love him freely and to return his love freely. It's like the difference between having a child you rear and you love and you nurture, and that child maintains this wonderful respect and love for you—which a child doesn't have to, a child could reject you—versus having a pet. A pet—a dog—will never go away from you. We would all be little dogs.

(New question.) Is there anything about being free that would make me more able to know God? The answer is because **God is free, so therefore by being free I can know God in a way that your dog cannot know you.** Your dog knows a lot about you but doesn't really know you. It can't because a dog isn't a human person, doesn't have your nature. The whole idea about the soul and the spirit is that we are sharing in the divine nature even though we are living in a material form.

(On reading James) He is quoting James. "We are judged on the law of mercy, and God will be merciless on those who do not show mercy." Well, that's said in so many different ways in the gospels, too. "What you measure out will be measured back to you." "If you are unforgiving, you will not be forgiven."

Contingency makes freedom possible.

The question is if we have the free will to choose and we choose to be sinful and all good comes from God, he creates the goodness in us, then we are creating the badness for the sin. Is that a true statement? Well, in a sense it's true. The only thing you have a right to completely own is your sin—everything else is God's.

(Question.) I haven't talked about the soul evolving! My understanding is **the soul belongs to the necessary core, and therefore that would not be subject to evolution.** The evolution is more the physical part of our being, the lower part. The soul is part of this idea that leads. It's the form, or the pattern. Soul is our capacity to experience.

(Question about God's plan for us and human freedom.) You have to keep in mind that the human will, the human freedom, belongs really to the spiritual realm, but it's encased in the physical, the material world. We are living in the material world, and we make our decisions in the material world, and therefore they are all piecemeal. So that's

how your will grows and develops toward God or away from God in discrete steps. It's because of the incarnation of the spirit with the material world.

I dropped out a whole section on the idea of mind. Think about mathematics and mind itself. Mind to me must be a much bigger issue than simply our minds. So the **whole idea of order in the universe speaks to me of mind.** The whole talk in Scripture about angels, for example—that's all talking about a true aspect of reality, but not a material one. **When we talk about ourselves, we are talking about a spiritual reality that's incarnate in a material, physical, spatial, temporal mode. And that's how we choose.** With angels we are talking about mind not incarnate in a material world.

(About inequality of freedom.) **I don't think we are equally free, and I don't think we are equally responsible.** That's the whole idea of Americans. This is what bothers me about our country. We have already achieved a point where most of us don't have to worry about eating and where we are going to sleep and so on, and yet what do we do with our time? What do we do with our resources? Are we doing something more than taking care of ourselves? That's the worry. Now other people, you can't blame them if every day all they can do is forage for food. That is their limit, the limit to their freedom. **I know God knows all things, so he understands every person in their own situation.**

Does God know what we are going to choose all the time? **My view is that God in eternity knows how everything turns out, knows everything as a present moment.** I know that is not very easy to grasp, but I have come to believe that.

I hope this whole idea was helpful to you. Remember that joke about how everyone slept during my homilies? Well, one man came and said, "The problem isn't that I sleep during your homilies. The problem is you keep me up at night."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (The Hail Mary.)
Thank you, all.