

Sunday Message from Fr William for the Twenty-Ninth Sunday of the Year 2023

The 'Other World' continued

The 'other world' spoken of by Jesus (*Luke 20:35*) is the life of the Trinity – an eternal going forth of the Son from the Father in infinite Freedom, and eternal return to the Father in infinite, self-giving Love, 'bridged over' by the Spirit. As human beings we have been created to be taken up into this 'other world', taken up into the life of the Trinity, taken up into this eternal life of freedom and love. This is the Christian answer to the perennial question: What is the meaning and purpose of our existence?

If we are to attain any notion at all what it means for human beings to be taken up into the 'other world', to be taken up into the life of Father, Son and Spirit, we need clarity about what it is to be a human being. We need an adequate anthropology.

There's a story in Genesis 2 about the Garden of Eden, and the paradisaical life of man and woman in the Garden of Eden. During the days of this paradisaical life, God gives the man a task to perform – the naming of the animals. This is not just something to do to while away the hours in the carefree days of Eden. Karol Wojtyła, in his *Theology of the Body*, attributes a specific purpose to this task. In the naming of the animals the man learns something fundamental about himself. He learns that although he is in many ways similar to the animals, created as he is, like them from the dust of the earth, he is also in one precise way utterly different, distinct, unique among the species that God has made. (*TOB 5 – 10.10.1997*)

There's a sort of parallel here with secular anthropology, and the question of human distinctness. What is it that distinguishes human beings from other animals? But it's a question that, I would say, anthropology cannot answer without input from man's theological pre-history laid out in the opening chapters of Genesis. Humans, it was once thought, differed from other animals by their use of tools and their overall superiority in a range of cognitive abilities. Close observation of the behaviours of chimpanzees and other great apes has proved these ideas to be wrong. (eg *Scientific American 01.09.2014*). And so other capabilities get put forward as candidates to try to maintain the conviction that humans are in some way qualitatively different from other animals: language, planning, self-awareness, self-determination, delayed gratification, choice, and so on. One by one these candidates fall by the wayside as new research discovers that these capabilities are to be observed, at least to some degree, in other species. I, for one, have no difficulty accepting that, on the material level, the difference between human beings and other animals is a difference only of degree. We are more evolved. We have a bigger cerebral cortex.

What makes human beings fundamentally different from the other animals is not more advanced evolution in this world, but something beyond this world, a bolt from the 'other world'. Go back to 'the beginning', to Genesis 2 and take a look at how human beings are created. There is one crucial step not included in the creation of any of the other animals, only in the creation of Man.

to be continued

Wilson

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