

Sunday Message from Fr William for the Thirty-Fourth Sunday of the Year 2023

The 'Other World' continued from 19.11.23

The question was: Are we, as human beings, filled with the Spirit in this world, filled with the Spirit in the 'other world', or are we filled with the Spirit in both? Christianity gives its answer. The Spirit is 'breathed' into us (Genesis 2:7) in manifold ways throughout history, in manifold ways through our own spiritual growth in this world, in an unprecedented way in the Christian Pentecost (~ AD 30) and subsequently in each individual in the Sacrament of Confirmation, their 'personal pentecost'. This is all in this world, and it is incremental. In the 'other world' we experience something that is utterly new, a new spiritualisation of the body, utterly new, and yet the ultimate conclusion and consummation of all the spiritualisation that has gone before, the completion of Man's creation, the new and final spiritualisation of the body.

How will we experience this new spiritualisation of the body? Clearly there is an essential continuity between this world and the 'other world'. Each of us is the same person in the 'other world' as we are in this. The body is the substratum of this essential continuity. I am this body in this world, and I will be this body in the next.

But as well as continuity there is transformation, a spiritualisation that is of an order different to anything already experienced in this world. In this world the Spirit is 'breathed' into Man gradually, incrementally, because the Spirit meets resistance all the way. This resistance gradually gives way across a lifetime. In the 'other world', by contrast, all resistance is gone. It's not that human resistance has crumbled and the Spirit has 'won', as if invaded by an alien power. This is the perfect coming together of Man and Spirit in which each has chosen the other. It is a 'marriage' in which each has freely given themselves to the other, and in doing so have together created something new – eschatological Man, Man as he is in the 'other world'.

We're not talking here about the disembodiment of Man. On the contrary, in this new spiritualisation of the body, effected by the free and perfect coming together between Man and Spirit, the somatic nature of Man, his bodiliness, emerges in its true and final perfection. Paul calls it the 'spiritual body' (σῶμα πνευματικόν) of the 'other world' as opposed to the physical body (σῶμα ψυχικόν) of this world. (1 Corinthians 15:44)

'This spiritualisation of the body,' says Karol Wojtyła, 'will be the source of its power and imperishability.' (*Theology of the Body* 72 – 10.02.82). We will experience, for example, the 'perfect sensitivity of the senses', and their 'perfect harmonization' with all that we are and all that we experience in the 'other world'.

Did John of the Cross, that Spanish mystic of the sixteenth century, somehow have a foretaste of the 'other world' in this regard? 'Sometimes', he records, 'the unction of the Holy Spirit overflows into the body and all the sensory substance. All the members and bones and marrow rejoice, not in so slight a fashion as is customary, but with a feeling of great delight and glory, even in the outermost joints of the hands and feet.' (*Living Flame of Love* 2:20)

to be continued...



Christ the King, 26 November 2023