

Sunday Message from Fr William for Fourth Sunday of Easter 2024

The 'Other World' continued from 14.04.24

It is a well-known teaching of the Christian Tradition that Man is created 'in the image and likeness of God'. Commentators have variously sought to pinpoint the precise way in which human beings are created in image and likeness of God. For example Man is, like God, a spiritual being. Or, Man is a rational creature, like God, capable of intellectual reasoning, rational thought. Or, Man, like God, has a capacity for making free choices. These are true and valid accounts of how the nature of Man reflects the nature of his Creator. And in these reflections on the 'other world', the spiritualisation of Man and everything that it means for us to be free have been major themes.

But go back to the source of this teaching that Man is created in the 'image and likeness of God'. Go back to the context. You'll find it Chapter One of Genesis:

'God created man in the image of himself,
in the image of God he created him,
male and female he created them.' (*Genesis 1:27*)

Wow. Male and female he created them. Not 'spiritual he created them', or 'rational he created them', or 'free he created them, but *'male and female he created them.'* It is this specific characteristic – our maleness and femaleness – above all other characteristics, that is singled out in the Genesis account Man's creation 'in the image and likeness of God'. It's hard not to deduce that our maleness and femaleness is the principal way, not the only way but the principal way, in which we are created in the image and likeness of our Creator.

What are we to make of this? Well, to answer this question we need to discover, or maybe rediscover, a whole dimension of this created world that is almost universally forgotten or overlooked – the dimension of *meaning*. And we need to discover, or maybe rediscover, our capacity for 'reading' and understanding the meaning of things in this created world. This dimension of *meaning* is something that Jesus, throughout his teaching, is totally aware of, totally tuned into. Look at the tiny mustard seed, he says, that grows into the biggest shrub of all. Look at the sower sowing seeds in his field. Look at the yeast mixed in with the flour. Look at the shepherd leading his flock. Look at the vine and its branches. Look at the birds in the sky and the flowers in the field. These things are not just the wonders of creation. They each have a meaning. They point to something above and beyond themselves. They point to the kingdom of heaven. The created things of this world point, in fact, to the 'other world'. The Creator is not just creating wonders. He is, in each of these created things, speaking to us of the kingdom of heaven; whispering to us of the 'other world'.

Most especially then among the wonders of creation, the human body, the pinnacle of Creation, and the human body above all in its maleness and femaleness, is not just functional. It is functional, and wonderfully so, but it is not just functional: It has a meaning. It is very much part of the created world, but it also points to something beyond itself and beyond this world. And we need to learn how to read it.

to be continued...

William

21st April 2024