

## Sunday Message from Fr William for Fifth Sunday of Easter 2024

*The 'Other World' continued from 21.04.24*

The human body – What does it mean? The human body in particular in its maleness and femaleness – What does it mean? Now you might be thinking, 'What does that question even mean?' We're used to asking what a thing looks like, how it is composed, how it functions. We're not used to asking what things mean. As one prominent psychologist explains: Our left hemisphere has, since the scientific era, dominated our approach, while our right hemisphere, with its openness to the world of symbols, has atrophied. (Iain McGilchrist – *The Matter with Things*). And more recently Pope Francis: 'How can we become once again capable of symbols? How can we again know how to read them and be able to live them?' (*Desiderio Desideravi* 45). (Make a mental note for later: he offers us this challenge in a teaching on the Liturgy.)

Inspired authors of scripture were well aware that the created order carries meaning. Eg:

*The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and the firmament shows forth the work of his hands.*

*Day unto day takes up the story and night unto night makes known the message. (Psalm 18 (19))*

Yes, the panoply of stars, the alternation of darkness and light, the setting and the rising of the sun – these things carry a meaning. They point beyond themselves to the life of 'other world'. Through the whole created order, and through each new marvel that springs from his creative power, the Creator is speaking to us about himself and about our relationship to Him. They speak of the kingdom of heaven. And I wrote in my previous reflection how Jesus is continually teaching us now to read the meaning of the created world.

To learn the meaning of the human body I take as my guide an authority I've quoted several times already in these reflections – Karol Wojtyła – and the collection of his writings that have come to be known as 'The Theology of the Body'. Foundational to this teaching is the concept '*significato sponsale del corpo*'. This has been variously translated from the Italian as '*nuptial meaning of the body*', or '*nuptial significance of the body*', or '*spousal significance of the body*' or '*spousal meaning of the body*'. Michael Waldstein, himself an authority on this teaching and who had access to the hitherto unknown Polish manuscript predating the Italian publication, recommends settling for '*spousal meaning of the body*'.

Well what does this mean? It means that the human body, in its maleness and femaleness, speaks of 'gift' and specifically of 'the gift of self'. In the context of marriage it's well understood that husband and wife give themselves to each other. But the *spousal meaning* of the body goes beyond this. Self-giving is written into the human body in its maleness and femaleness, written there by the Creator. The *spousal meaning* of the body is also more than just the functional compatibility and complementarity of male and female, more even than the orientation towards mutual self-giving. It is something that 'speaks' to the human subjects, to each and to each other. It speaks of gift. And human beings are created with a capacity to read this *spousal meaning*. In fact, becoming fully human includes the facility to read the *spousal meaning* of the body and to live it in spontaneity.

Cast your mind back to the second of these reflections on the 'other world' when I asked: 'What is the Father like?' Answer: He is all giving, giving, giving. (16 July 2023).

Maleness and Femaleness are like His personal signature – 'gift' – inscribed into the human body. '*In the image of himself he created them: Male and Female he created them.*'

*to be continued...*

28<sup>th</sup> April 2024