

## **IT'S BEYOND ME!**

Did you watch the eclipse of the sun on April 8th? Many people certainly did watch it, even traveling a great distance to get a good sight. And, more to my point today, did you look at the faces of the people watching the eclipse as appearing on news reports? I saw faces mesmerized in astonishment and wonder. Their clear eyes revealed the depths of their spirit. It reminded me of looking at a new born baby. The infant's eyes portray a sense of infinity. There was awe and wonder in people's countenances on April 8th as they beheld something beyond them.

We are all used now to the wonders of technology. We may react with delight and even wonder at what our mechanical devices are able to do for us. But we get used to these things and are not surprised by them. A man wrote me after the eclipse saying that he felt very small watching it. That isn't a bad reaction. We humans are a small part in an immense cosmos. We need to have respect and care for the rest of this wonderful creation. But, at the same time, our faith tradition tells us that we have been made in the image and likeness of God. This can be better expressed by knowing that God loves me as I am, as an individual, sharing the humanity that God took on himself in Jesus Christ, as well as the humanity that is scarred and sinful. Pope Saint Leo, in a Christmas sermon, said "Remember, Christian, your dignity – you have become one in nature with God."

The created world, including human beings, are basically good. We don't have to earn God's love and forgiveness. It is always awaiting us. It is just up to us to accept it and try to live accordingly. With the Psalmist (139), we can truthfully pray, "... It was you who created my being, knit me together in my mother's womb. I thank you for the wonder of my being, for the wonders of all your creation." From the beginning, Genesis proclaimed the goodness of creation. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, friend of Martin Luther King and adviser for the Second Vatican Council, proclaimed that creation is a great blessing and that existence is God's gift to us. Why do we doubt it? The two thousand year history of Christianity witnesses heresy after heresy that sees creation only as matter and not all spirit, defiled and even evil. Donatism, Gnosticism, Manicheanism, Albigensianism, Jansenism are heretical parts of our history and keep on popping up even in our own day.

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The world today is very beset with fear, despair, lack of hope. I think there are a number of reasons for this. Affluence, the search for a more secular world without God being present, start a long list of what we are living through in these days.

Without God being present in our daily life, we are very much turned over to our own devices. We tend to think we have all the resources to run our own lives. When we can no longer readily do so, we can quickly give in to despair. I think we need to be on guard against despair. We give up on trusting God. Saint Thomas Aquinas looked on despair as the “most dangerous” of all sins. There are worse sins for sure but when someone is in despair s/he does not care about the self or others. Despair kills compassion. Despair is being preached today by politicians who seek power and even desire chaos to make their own agendas seem reasonable.

How to deal with despair? First, and most important, Soak yourself in the good, the true and the beautiful. Touch the goodness of creation and know that you yourself are part of it. Know God as beauty (not as task-Master). Be grateful. Build on thankfulness and a sense of wonder. Walter Brugeremann, Old Testament scholar, advocates “prophetic imagination.” A prophet can imagine the world other than the way they see before them. And “prophetic” alludes to professing God as a reality who acts in the world. God is a lively agent and a real character. Brugeremann contrasts the prophet with most conservative evangelicals who have God all wrapped up into systematic explanations. And these latter preachers differ from those mostly theological progressives who don’t believe that God is a lively agent who believe God has no hands but their hands. If you find that insight illuminating, you should read his writing on militarism, ecology, consumerism, ecumenism. And it is all to be found in the Old Testament which so many Christians neglect.

The author admits the institutional church is a very weak instrument for the prophetic imagination. So we Christians must respond with energy, courage, freedom and the sense of being otherwise. This is not the same as seeking certainty in what we believe. And certainly better than despair. So lift up your hearts. The heart with its response to the love of God embracing us is the key to overcoming despair. I am still working on it. Are you? Share with me at:

[joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org)

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**Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL**

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.