



HOMILY FOR 7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

During the washing up, have you ever looked at a tray of greasy water, and when you drop into it the washing-up liquid, the grease shoots to the side, clearing a space in the middle. That to me is the opening image of Creation in the Bible. There is a chaotic mass, turbulent waters, and then the Spirit appears over it and a safe, protected space is suddenly created in which Creation can take place. In the Israelite prayers they often refer to the danger of the waters just beyond Creation flowing back in if God fails to protect them.

After this the process of Creation begins, and in the early story, in a week. But the time is not important, what the early story-tellers were trying to express is that it was a process, a development, but always with God present in some way, with God always enjoying it, seeing that it was good, as the Bible says repeatedly.

We would tell the story differently today. With our modern scientific knowledge, which itself has been and is a developing understanding of the universe, we can say more about the physical start and in the 20th century began to know more about the complexity of time and space, which we could not have imagined before. No doubt people in years to come will consider our efforts simplistic, but a useful stage. Evolution goes on in the universe and our abilities are part of that growth.

As we come to believe in our own abilities more, the feeling of a need for a god starts to diminish. It's as if we have said to God, 'Don't worry, we have got this now, you were useful before when we thought the power in a volcano or a storm were inexplicable, or the seasons and rains were dependant on satisfying a divine being, but we know better now.

But I think we are also more than slightly uneasy with this approach. When we decide that we are the final arbiters, or the controllers of our world, with no one or thing beyond us, and alongside this that we can remove the concept of love and relationship from the process of our evolution, then human beings are without control, which we do like.

But this has a serious affect on how we decide about the lives of others, of animals, of the planet. We decide what is best. Which is of course exactly what the whole Garden of Eden, eating the fruit of the tree, parable is all about.

We have removed the mystery in our lives, because it is outside our control, and made love a thing of science not of the heart.

When Jesus says that his work is done he does not mean that the re-creation of our world is over.

But like Creation, the process has begun. His arrival, the incarnation, his taking on our humanity, and then living it and dying, out of love for us, and in all this his being both God and human, is the arrival of mystery in our form in our world, so that we could encounter mystery.

Over the centuries we have developed an image of God that has not been helpful in a scientific world, and because our spiritual development is often way behind our scientific development, we have stuck with an image of God that is easy not to believe in. Old men with white beards, angels on clouds, and relegated angels, heavenly beings anyway, to battling vampires on TV.

But the image Jesus comes to underline is again from those early stories of Creation. What does it mean to say we are made in the image and likeness of God?

What does it mean in the psalm to say that we are little less than gods?

God arrives in our image, out of love, to offer us the chance to rediscover the mystery, the wonder in our lives, that can be found in beauty, in love, in the amazing event of Creation.

His presence, his message, is an invitation to grasp just that. Having seen it, having understood that the science we are so good at, is not something averse to God, or opposed, but part of our discovery of the wonder of our world, part of our realisation that the more we know, the more we should give thanks for what we have been given, and that our late discovery of the process of evolution is not something that persuades us that there is no God, but that in fact God is present all the time, and what he sees in our development is indeed very good.

Where we come in as people of faith is that we continue to carry out Jesus' work of sharing the good news, that when we look at life, at love, these are both precious, and something that we have to know have been given to us, and are not things that we can control as we would wish. Especially life. That there is an ethics, a morality that involves not just us but the whole Universe, and that we are not the final arbiters. When we think we are things go wrong, especially for the weak and the poor and the vulnerable.

When Jesus speaks of glorifying, in the Old Testament 'glory' or the 'Shekinah,' refers to the presence of God, and that is what he means. When Moses wants to see God, God hides him in a cleft in the rock as he passes because God is too majestic to be seen. But with his arrival Jesus is making God's presence visible in himself, as St. Paul tells us, so that we may come to know God.

He is beginning the process of us reconnecting with God.

And when he says he, Jesus, is glorified in us, he means that we too, along with beauty, wonder, and creation, we too (part of it all) continue to make God present in this world and as such we are all part of that beauty, part of what God finds so good in the world.

But also messengers of the Mystery, and ready to speak out on its behalf. Because to fail to see the role of Mystery in our world is to diminish our world and our purpose in it.