

December 21, 2003

The Sunday before the Lord's Nativity

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

On "day one" (**yom 'ehad**) of Creation, God's word is described as creating only one thing, light. This light is the beginning of His works, the first reality "outside God" to exist. And just as "day one" is the root of all the succeeding days of Creation, this light, the first of His works, is the font and foundation of everything else that God makes. The light is the substratum of all created existence.

The light abiding in the world affirms that the world is not chaotic. Its formation is not the result of the random activity of physical and chemical forces. To say that the world is **created** is to assert that it is intelligently designed and replete with intelligible meaning. This meaning is what the Bible calls "light."

In this respect the Bible confirms what our reason already tells us. No truly rational person, examining the structure of the world, will reach a different conclusion. Those who do so are "without excuse"; indeed, they are said to "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18,20). For this reason, the willful denial of the light is the supreme offense, because "this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:19).

By this light God has revealed Himself in His Creation, so that "His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Romans 1:20). Seeing requires light. These attributes of God are clearly seen because God's first, primordial act of Creation is the shedding of light. The base line of all things, then, is the light. Everything else that exists is the extension of an inner luminosity.

This light at the heart of created being is effected by God's first word spoken outside of Himself, "Let there be light." And just as "day one" is the root of all the succeeding days of Creation, so this first word of God, "Let there be light," is the font and foundation of everything else that God will ever say. Light is both the principle and summation of His word.

Moreover, God created the light first, because He Himself is light: "This is the message that we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Truly, He is "the Father of lights" (James 1:17).

That first light created by the word of God in Genesis was not the light of the sun, of course, because the sun was not fashioned until the fourth day. Indeed, the first and underlying light of Creation is not a physical thing at all. It is a spiritual, metaphysical light, rather, the inner luminosity of truth, the radiance embodied in everything else that God makes. This is the light "which only the light-giving Light, who is God Himself, could have made. . . . He is His own eternal Light and is also the giver of light" (Augustine of Hippo, **Reply to Faustus** 22.8-9).

It is this first light that separates Creation from chaos, the topsy-turviness of non-being described in the Hebrew text as **tohu wabohu**, formlessness and void (Genesis 1:2). Outside of this light, there is only the darkness that the Bible calls night. (Night, then, is not the mere absence of the sun. As the simplest reader of the Bible can see, three evenings and mornings preceded the very existence of the sun.) Nighttime abides in Creation as the vestigial symbol of the non-existence that preceded God's initial word of Creation. Darkness describes that which is outside of God's word.

It is the teaching of the New Testament that that primordial light of Creation is

identical with the life that is in God's eternal, consubstantial Word: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4). Thus, when this eternal Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us, the inner light of the world became manifest in history.

The divine glory shining on the human face of God's eternal Word fulfills the prophecy implied in the initial words of Creation, "Let there be light!" In the historical revelation of God's Word, we are given to behold, in the flesh, God's first message in Creation: "For it is the God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

For this reason Christians look upon all created things through the light that shines on the face of Christ. In the beginning God said, "Let there be light." "Now , however, He has said nothing at all, but Himself has become the light for us" (John Chrysostom, **Homilies on Second Corinthians* 8.3*).

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