

26 December 2021—The First Sunday after Christmas: John 1 1-18

St. Augustine writes a pagan once said the beginning of John's Gospel, today's Gospel, "...should be written in letters of gold and hung up in all churches in the most conspicuous place." This is high praise, from a non-believer. The pagan recognized the centrality of these eighteen verses to our Faith. Their significance has not been lost on Christians. For several centuries, the liturgical practice of the Church included reading this passage before dismissing worshipers at the principal Sunday service: the so-called 'last Gospel.' As we leave worship this is the Truth we are to carry into the world. What is this Truth revealed?

First, consider the word "Word." This harkens back to Genesis 1—God creates by speaking; this in contrast to pagan creation myths in which the gods create through killing a monster and using its dead carcass for the earth. John reveals God's 'impulse' of creation in the beginning is now manifest in Christ who brings God's 2nd creation. This surely is the background for Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17: *If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.* To be 'in Christ,' that is put one's hope in Christ, following his will for us and everyone day by day, is both to receive this new creation and share this new creation. Salvation is not so much about getting to heaven but being made new by, in, and through Christ now.

John proclaims *All things came into being through Christ* (v3). All life springs from God. There is no thing, no being apart from God, whether recognized or not. In Colossians 1:15ff we read: *He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in Him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible...and in him all things hold together.* The implication is so simple, we might miss it: God is *in* and *for* creation, *in* and *for* all that is. God is not a puzzle to solve. God longs for the intention of creation—union with himself—to be completed.

Next John writes: *What has come into being in Christ was life, and the life was the light of all people* (v3c-4). Light is a primary image for God. Why? We don't 'see' light; we see what light illumines. The symbol of Light teaches us God is not merely a life-giving force. God is the One through whom and in whom all knowledge and wisdom is bestowed, again if we perceive this Truth or not. Therefore, the most basic prayer is asking God for the wisdom, discernment, and knowledge to live ever more into God' will for oneself and everyone. Why else would there be so many miracle stories involving sight in the New Testament. And note this light is for all people. God's wisdom and knowledge is not an exclusive possession.

A last observation is this: later in the passage John declares—*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth* (v14). Early Christians' minds were blown by this sign of God's infinite love and mercy, God's eternal, unquenchable desire for our salvation. St. John Chrysostom wrote: *For he become Son of man, who was God's own Son, in order that he might make the children of earth to be children of God.* Many through the centuries echo his words. CS Lewis from a slightly different angle wrote that Jesus the Word made flesh is a sure sign that because we are so precious to God there are no depths to which God will not sink for us and our salvation.

Jesus the Word made flesh is the image and bestower of God's Life and Light for all. He offered his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28), and as his followers we are to do the same: offering our lives, receiving wisdom, discernment, and knowledge in our lives, serving Christ through our service to others, serving others in Christ's Name, for God's glory, proclaiming by word and deed that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

A 12-minute homily barely scratches the surface. Therefore, I give you an assignment: everyday, at least once a day this week, read John 1:1-18, slowly and aloud, and sit with it for five or ten minutes in silence. Invite God to come to you through the words in whatever way God desires; whatever happens, or doesn't happen, end your time with giving thanks.

O God, who wonderfully created and yet more wonderfully restored the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.