

February 7th. 2021. Second Sunday Before Lent.

Proverbs 8, 1, 22-31, Psalm 104, 26-end, John 1, 1-14

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Many of us know places where the countryside inspires us. In the alpine region of south-east France, there are awe-inspiring mountains, where many people go skiing in winter and walking in summer. Or the rocky mountains of Provence, north of Marseille, many peaks with a special name, such as le Garlaban and le Taoumé, which so inspired the writer, Marcel Pagnol, as he wrote about his childhood there. In our own country, we have magnificent views from the tops of mountains, such as the Pennines, Ingleborough in the Yorkshire Dales or Helvellyn in the Lake District, or Ben Nevis in Scotland and Snowdon in Wales. Faced with such views we may feel insignificant compared to the sheer size and vastness of it all, and wonder at how all this came into existence.

In today's first reading, the writer sees wisdom as present with God at the creation of the world, standing at God's side, although there is no suggestion here that she played an active part in it. Wisdom is then seen in the concept of the Word, existing from the beginning in the prologue to John's Gospel.

Since the moon landings in 1969, we have become more aware than ever of the sheer vastness of the universe and our small part as human beings within it, already described by the psalmist in Psalm 8:

'When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have ordained,
What is man, that you should be mindful of him;
the son of man, that you should seek him out?'

Or Psalm 19:

'The heavens are telling the glory of God
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
One day pours out its song to another
and one night unfolds knowledge to another.'

We may be overawed also by the vastness of the sea. We don't know how deep Lake Windermere is, let alone the vast oceans, and we feel powerless when confronted by the havoc, which water can wreak, as we have seen once again in the recent floods, all this expressed vividly by Lord Byron in Childe Harold:

'Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean - roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;

Man marks the earth with ruin – his control
Stops with the shore.'

In Psalm 104, the most marvellous work of God's creation is seen as the taming of the ocean, now the home of God's creatures. Even Leviathan, the monster of the deep, plays in the water.

'There is the sea, spread far and wide
and there move creatures beyond number, both small and great.
There go the ships, and there is that Leviathan
which you have made to play in the deep.'

The psalmist concludes that God's presence will continue for ever, and there is joy as he contemplates the wonders of God's work.

'May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works;
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will make music to my God while I have my being.'

In his Gospel, John takes us back to the mysterious time before the beginning, showing that God has existed from all eternity with his Word, who is his mind and purpose and the agent of his revelation. The writer sees God as creating life for fellowship with him and light for knowledge of him. But this ever-present life and light has been rejected by his own people. Finally, the Word has revealed God's glory by becoming a human being in the person of Jesus Christ, who comes to bring a new creation and to be revealed as the light and life of the world. Through belief in him, we are enabled to become children of God.

As we contemplate the countryside, sea and sky, we cannot grasp the vastness of it all, and we ask how God can care for the earth and everything in it, realising, as we now do, that our planet is only a small part of a vast universe.

It is here that faith begins. Faith accepts the physical facts of what we see and our increasing knowledge of the world and universe. But through faith we believe that, as John puts it, we are born through the will of God, who created us, knows us and loves us.

'Still east and west his love extends,
and always, near or far,
he calls and claims us as his friends
and loves us as we are.'

We have limited knowledge, but we cannot confine God to that. We have to look in hope and trust beyond our limited understanding to the limitless possibilities offered in God's love, the God, who knows us individually and never stops loving. By this we are able to be the children

and friends of God. In Genesis, God is seen as placing the man in the garden of Eden to “till it and keep it”. So today, we have to look after our environment by not littering it or polluting it, realising that its preservation becomes ever more urgent. That is our responsibility as children and friends of God, and it is where faith will lead us, if we are open to God’s creating and sustaining love.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.