

August 20, 2017

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

"May God let his face shine upon us"

There is nothing that can eclipse this light

I received a newsletter this past week from Jesuit Fr. Rick Ganz from his "Faber Institute" in Portland in which he quotes from "Canticle of the Sun" by St. Francis of Assisi (ca. 1226).

"Most High, all powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no person is worthy to mention Your name. Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness. Praise be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful."

"Oregon awaits the Sun's total eclipse. On Monday at 10:18am in this region, the Moon will begin to cover the Sun. This process of obscuring the Sun will continue for some 2 minutes and 2 seconds.

"How interesting it is that the Sun's unobstructed light will not bring millions out of their homes to look up at its splendor, reflecting on the life to the world that it brings. Instead, we pay attention to "the dying of the light," thronging into clotted masses of people wearing odd glasses on upturned faces – the Sun darkened by a rogue Moon working in a smoky sky. It seems that we humans have a taste for darkness, or perhaps more to the point, a fear of the light (note the odd glasses) ... or at least we are ambivalent about having too much of it. This reminds me of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, 'And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.'"

The Eclipse of the Sun

The rarity of a solar eclipse prompts this widespread interest. But is there a deeper symbolic meaning to this event? This quote from a spiritual pamphlet was read at one of last week's daily masses:

"The eclipse follows the Oregon Trail and the Trail of Tears, both of which could be compared to the Exodus. The Oregon Trail represented hopes for a new beginning, in a new land of promise, even though there were tremendous hardships and suffering along the way.

The Trail of Tears represented the forced relocation and displacement of native Americans on a trail filled with immense hardship and suffering. The eclipse passes directly over St. Joseph, Missouri, near the "mainland midpoint area," the jumping off point for those who decided not to continue on further. Now, perhaps all this means nothing, but still it has caused me to fast and pray for our nation in a whole new way."

A reflection

I'm not raising this as some kind of new-age revelation or ancient prophecy, but I am asking, does this eclipse reflect some kind of deeper spiritual dimension? Listen again to St. Francis; "*Praise be You, my Lord, through Brother Sun, Sister Moon and the stars in heaven.*" This is more than romantic poetry. Francis recognized that God is in all things, that it was God he was reverencing in the natural world around him.

The scriptures are filled with spiritual interpretations of natural events, seeing in them manifestations of God. These are popularly called Shekina. For instance, the conception of Abraham, the burning bush, the column of smoke and fire, the parting of the sea, the manna in the desert, water flowing from the rock, the annunciation, the virgin birth, Jesus' miracles, Jesus' resurrection and so forth, plus reports in faith of miracles occurring ever since.

Coming to our present world, our faith tells us that Shekinas are occurring all around us all the time? How about the eclipse? Might this be a Shekina? It is cutting right through the middle of this country. Is this symbolizing something that is happening across this country that we need to see - American society being cut in two by the struggle between white supremacy and civil rights?

How do any of us know. I guess it's all in how we look at it. I do wonder how many will see a spiritual dimension in the phenomenon that is happening in the sky - tomorrow.

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