



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Two Sources of Wonder

Given at Belmont Abbey, North Carolina

What would your top five amazing phenomena be if you were suddenly asked to list them? Things that leave you so stunned with wonder that you almost think you're dreaming? Here are five of my more recent ones:

- 1 Looking up at the milky way on a cloudless night.
- 2 Looking at a snowflake on my sleeve.
- 3 Meeting a friend after he had undergone a heart transplant.
- 4 Knowing what the silicon chip in my computer can do.
- 5 Watching a movie on the first days of life in the womb.

Each person would make his own personal list.

The fact is that we are surrounded by stunningly amazing phenomena and perhaps quite a lot of the time we are almost punch-drunk by wonder-overload.

But let's look again at the sources of our wonder.

Each fact that we are aware of, everything that we hold to be part of reality, falls into one of two categories. We are aware of it either because of our Reason or because of our Faith.

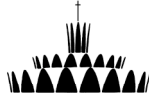
Reason. This is the area fed by our senses: Aristotle's dictum translated by the Scholastics ran something like 'nihil in mente nisi prius in sensu.' we have nothing in our minds unless it has previously been fed to them via our senses. Most if not all of the stunned-wonder top five came obviously from this category.

The other source of our awareness is Faith.

I tell my students that

FAITH IS A GIFT
THRU WHICH WE BELIEVE
THOSE THINGS TO BE TRUE
THAT THE EYE CANNOT SEE
BUT THAT GOD HAS REVEALED.

I believe them to be True. I hold that they are part of Reality. But it is thru the Gift of Faith that God gives me that I have this realization and it is always limited and uncomfortable vision, seeing, as St. Paul said, "as thru a glass darkly."



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What would my top five faith-based stunned-wonder facts be? What has the Word of God, what has the Son of God, Jesus Christ told me that I would otherwise not have known? Here are my top Five:

- 1 God so loved the world that he sent his only son so that anyone who believed in him might not perish but might have eternal life. (Jn. 3:16)- each person, from the beginning of the world loved that much by God. Amazing!
- 2 If anyone loves me he will keep my word and my father will love him and we shall come to him and make our home with him .(Jn. 14:23) - even now, if I am trying to love God, I have God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, dwelling in me. Amazing!
- 3 Anyone who believes in me will never die. (Jn. 11:26)- immortality is mine if I believe in Christ.
- 4 This is my body. (Mt. 26:26) This is my blood. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. (Jn. 6:56)- thru communion we have Christ dwelling with us.
- 5 I have told you all this so that my own joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (Jn. 15:11)

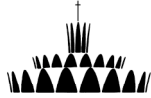
It becomes obvious very swiftly that the information- the facts if you like, that we are aware of, that is believe to be true, thru our faith - go far beyond the amazing phenomena that our senses feed to our mind.

All our hope is based on our faith.

I made up a third top-five stunned-wonder list once again based on Faith but this time it concerned what the Magisterium -Peter and the Apostles, the Pope and the Bishops, guiding us today with the authority that Vatican II described in Lumen Gentium - has presented to us authoritatively about who we are and how we are to behave. This is Jesus guiding us and teaching us today thru the authority that he wants his Church to have in faith and morals as it teaches us about Reality. Once again it is based on our FAITH in the Magisterium continuing to enlighten us about the implications of what God in Jesus revealed to us about ourselves and our behavior, or about who we are and therefore how we are to behave:

My top five stunned-wonder magisterial statements:

- 1 That the church has been given the authority by Jesus to interpret what is behavior in accordance with human nature and what is not. - the Church has the charism to interpret the natural law;
- 2 The Church teaches the almost divine dignity of the human being.
- 3 From conception human life is to be respected because at conception mother provides ovum, father provides sperm, and God provides spirit or immortal soul.
- 4 The conjugal union is to be the origin of the human being.
- 5 The grammar and syntax of sexual genital behavior is defined by what the



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conjugal act is meant to be namely:

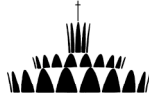
An act between
A husband and wife
Expressing love
And open to life.

The following texts provide instances of this teaching:

- 1 "Let no one of the faithful deny that the Magisterium of the Church is competent to interpret the natural moral law. For it is indisputable- as Our predecessors have often declared- that when Jesus Christ imparted His divine authority to Peter and the other apostles and sent them to all nations to teach His commandments, He established those very men as authentic guardians and interpreters of the whole moral law, that is, not only of the law of the Gospel, but also of natural law." (Humanae Vitae #4)
- 2 "Precisely by contemplating the precious blood of Christ, the sign of his self-giving love (cf. Jn 13:1), the believer learns to recognize and appreciate the almost divine dignity of every human being and can exclaim with ever renewed and grateful wonder: "How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he 'gained so great a Redeemer' (Exsultet of the Easter Vigil), and if God 'gave his only Son' in order that man 'should not perish but have eternal life!'"(cf. Jn 3:16) Gospel of Life # 25.
- 3 The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life. Gospel of Life #60
- 4 "...the gift of human life must be actualized in marriage through the specific and exclusive acts of husband and wife, in accordance with the laws inscribed in their persons and in their union." (Respect for Human Life Document. Feb 1987 Introduction #5)
- 5 '.. the deliberate use of the sexual faculty outside normal conjugal relations essentially contradicts the finality (purpose) of the faculty (or power). For it lacks the sexual relationship called for by the moral order, namely the relationship which realizes "the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love "Gaudium et Spes #51. . All deliberate exercise of sexuality must be reserved to this regular relationship.' (Vatican declaration on human sexuality section on masturbation.)

So from the above it is clear that through the gift of Faith we become aware that we and every other person has a value in the sight of God that goes far beyond anything we could have conceived as possible without our Faith.

We are this important in the eyes of God and therefore we are this important period.



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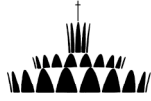


All the corruption and transitoriness of this life, the 'passingness of things', the 'sunt lacrimae rerum' of Virgil- tears woven into the very nature of things; the inbuilt tragedy of the ancients, the inbuilt meaninglessness of the Absurdist of our own century, all of this falling-apart world is to be transformed and a time will come if we trust The Way, The Truth and The Life when we are united in perfect bliss with our God our Lover, our Friend. This is what faith tell us. But it also tells us that the Spirit is already with us and so the joy is already here, the companionship of God is open to us now.

For here and now - even as I write this the Holy Spirit is with me- I am not scribbling alone. He is in my heart as Love- (The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Rom.5.5). He is in my mind as Wisdom because the Spirit in a person is present always as Love and as Wisdom- for these are the the two aspects of what makes me a person. My loving capacity and my knowing capacity. As a fire cannot give off warmth without at the same time giving off light so the Holy Spirit in my heart makes me able to love, in my mind makes me able to know. The implications of all of this are enormous.

St. Gregory says that [St. Benedict](#) in leaving the universities of his day at Rome was *scienter nescius et sapienter indoctus* - "wisely ignorant" "knowingly un-worldly wise" might be our way of putting it. I believe that this "wisdom" of the young Benedict has a message for us today. The Second Vatican Council baptized, as it were, the world of scientific knowledge in *Gaudium et Spes*. It is true that ALL truth, in whatever discipline it is discovered , is of the Holy Spirit. But it is of tremendous moment that we discern and distinguish the different values of these truths. It is most important, in this 'information age', that we don't become so absorbed by all the fascination that the Pandora's box of the world of the senses, the world of observation, of measurement and of discovery afford us that the divine wisdom and understanding based on Faith may no longer leaven the dough of our minds. Or that Prayer and *Lectio* get squeezed out as we watch one more video or explore one more Web Site. There is great danger that in our excitement we neglect to re-charge our faith batteries and yet it is on these faith batteries that the strength of our vision of the faith-based stunned-wonder world, as described in the examples given above, depend. And what the eyes see ends up in ashes; only what we see thru faith lasts for ever.

It is a symptom of this that over the last twenty five years in our educational system in Catholic schools we have tended to remove the Eucharist from being an integral part of the daily curriculum thus often making it almost impossible for our Catholic students to grow up fed by our eucharistic Lord and by his sacred word. For the nature of the academic day is such that it abhors a vacuum - particularly in our days of efficiency and strategic planning! The time not protected by the curriculum FOR eucharist too easily fills up with everything else;



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all of them visibly 'good' things.

We have over-emphasized the Academic at the expense of the Catechetical, the Measurable at the expense of the Mysterious. We have belittled the charism of the Magisterium to lead us like a lighthouse away from the rocks of error towards the harbor of wholeness that is holiness. We have concentrated on the reason-based wonder at the expense of faith-based wonder. We have become stunned with wonder at what our senses have shown us and have given too little time for some of those mysteries of our God, and therefore of ourselves made in his image, that through Prayer and Sacrament the Holy Spirit might have led us into; could, now, lead us into!

To regain our balance we need to remember Hans Urs Von Balthasar's dictum "We do Theology on our knees." Prayer is an integral part of our theology because it is the Holy Spirit in theology who is leading us ever more deeply into the mystery of God- the mystery of Jesus who is both Man and God; the mystery of ourselves who are made in the image and likeness of God; the mystery of our brothers and sisters wherever they are on the planet who are all, without exception, brothers and sisters of this Jesus.