

The Nighttime Sky

Homily by Matthew Bowe, Diocese of La Crosse

Reflection on Psalm 8

When you look up at the nighttime sky, what captivates you? When you see the multitudes of stars, what strikes you? When you consider the vastness of space, the grand distances between every object and the majestic sizes of the stars, do you feel significant or insignificant?

Brothers and sisters, before you grow too concerned that this homily will be far beyond the clouds, allow me to reassure you that I only ask you to consider what the psalmist of the eighth psalm was considering when he wrote. The psalmist gave praise to God. There is no other consideration than that the name of the Lord is awesome through all the earth, that majestic praise will be given by all, and that His enemies and avengers will not prevail. The psalmist begins and ends with praise to the Lord. With the praise of the Lord in the forefront of his mind, the rest of the psalm comes into focus.

Then, the psalmist looks up into the heavens, into the nighttime sky. Hence, this is the reason for the questions that I asked in the beginning. These same and other questions crossed the mind of the psalmist. Picture it. The moon is miles away from the earth. It reflects the light of the sun, which is millions of millions of miles of way. There are the stars, which are lightyears away, with the closest being a little over four lightyears away while the farthest extend beyond billions of lightyears away. The psalmist did not know this information, yet he dared to ask God, "What is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:5, NABRE). In a material sense, you and I are specks, infinitely miniscule. In a sense, we are insignificant. Is this true?

Remember that the psalmist has the praise of the Lord in the back of his mind. Creation is an artwork of the Lord, and the entirety of creation is good. The psalmist is not struck by the insignificance of mankind compared to the entirety of creation but

rather he is struck by the awesome attention that the Lord gives. The Lord is mindful of us and cares for us. In short, the Lord loves us. Of all the created things, it was man that the Lord “made little less than a god, crowned with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:6, NABRE). Thus, we are not insignificant. We are significant in that the Lord loves us and that we are crowned gloriously and honorably.

There is responsibility with this glory and honor. Given our royal status by the merits of our baptism, each of us are called to be stewards of God’s creation, working with Him to use appropriately creation to satisfy our needs and to ensure creation’s health and beauty. I think, also, that this applies to us. We are created in the image and likeness of God and should be treated as God’s creation. We should have a similar admiration and wonder for ourselves as we do when we look at the nighttime sky. I am reminded about a constellation called the Pleiades that I observed while on a Faith and Science Pilgrimage to Tucson, Arizona. Through the naked eye, you can see faintly seven stars (the name Pleiades refers to the seven sisters of the Titan Atlas in Greek mythology) clustered together. Taking a simple pair of binoculars will illumine each star clearly. Not only that, but there are more stars that you can see.

In a way, we are like these stars; we are that marvelous. If the Lord dwells within us inmost being, then there will always be more marvels to investigate. What then is the spiritual “binoculars” that we can use to penetrate the depths into our journey to dwell with God? Prayer, spending time with God, is the lenses by which we can penetrate the marvels of who we are. Not only should we relate to Him about what is going on with our lives – our emotions, desires, and wounds – but also listen to Him. When we go outside to marvel at the nighttime sky, do we speak? No. Rather, we simply stand or sit there, watching in marvel as the stars slowly wade across and time dissipates. That is one way to pray. To sit in silence, whether at home or in a church or chapel in front of a Blessed Sacrament, is a simple and excellent way to grow deeper into the marvels of who you are, that is, a beloved daughter or son of God the Father. It is not a complicated relationship, although we certainly can make it. Our Father simply wants to be with us, which He always is, and He wants us to be with Him.

We can learn quite a bit looking at the stars. When we look at the stars, we relax, we still our minds and hearts, and we simply marvel at the beauty of creation. When we pray, we can relax in the love of God, still our minds and hearts that are lifted wholly to Him, and simply marvel in His presence. When we marvel the stars, we look, but the stars do not look back. When we pray to God, we look to Him, and He gazes lovingly back at us. "O Lord, our Lord, how awesome is your name through all the earth!" (Psalm 8:2, NABRE).