

Faith and Science as Two Hands

Homily by Pedro Ruiz Aular, Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Reflection on Psalm 19

If you were told that a group of Catholic seminarians visited the Vatican Observatory, what would you think? Or if someone told you about some scientific priest, would you be shocked?

Before entering the seminary, I worked at a university for seven years as a director of postgraduate and scientific research. At the same time, I was a very faithful person, working closely with the Church, organizing retreats and participating in prayer groups. And yet, I never thought about the relationship between faith and science until I participated in a “pilgrimage” to the Vatican Observatory in Arizona.

This pilgrimage made me reflect about the beauty of creation and especially how creation is reflected in the immensity of the universe. When we were at Kitt Peak National Observatory, I came to realize how God speaks to his people in the universe through other his own creation, especially in the stars and solar system. This epiphany brought life to Psalms 19: “The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” People can discover this handiwork of God in the universe through observing and analyzing constellations. I also recall a lesson from Dr. Renu Malhotra, a professor at the University of Arizona: “The universe is evolving on many timescales – not eternally.” God’s handiwork is not itself eternal, but is rather an expression of love from an eternal God.

From this experience and these thoughts, I came to realize that faith and science are like two hands which complement one another. Science helps us contemplate the beauty and love of God in his creation, and thus we come to appreciate God as the arch-designer of the universe and all it contains. Both faith and reason are necessary to our intellectual and spiritual growth. The contemplation of all creatures both in the sky and on earth enables us to know God better through his creation.

Human beings are created with the ability to know and love by reason and spirit, faith and science. So science helps us to have a deeper relationship with God, and to have a deeper openness not only to the material world but also to spiritual dimensions of our lives because every part of the creation is a gift from God. They exist for our good and through them we can experience and explain some natural forces that are beyond our knowledge. Therefore, we are called upon to be people of faith who also appreciate science and embrace it to better understand God's work of creation. And through science we recognize that God's act of creation is continuous and not static.

This symbiosis between science and faith further helps me to understand the importance of science in our lives and how it can be used in a spiritual and pastoral way for the good of God's people, especially in light of new discoveries in the universe such as new galaxies. I encourage not only people in the pews but also priests and seminarians to have a deeper involvement in the dialogue between faith and science to better deepen their own holiness. Our knowledge of science helps us to experience deeper the beauty of creation and to become more responsible stewards of creation through love and charity.