

Daniel's reflection for week-beginning 26th November - 'Every Mass is a cosmic moment'. (St Pope John Paul II)

In his Jubilee letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Pope John Paul II, calling for 'a new springtime of Christianity', had intimations of the cosmic nuances of preparing for the third millennium. He was well aware of the significance of creation theology in this regard. 'The fact that in the fullness of time the eternal Word took on the condition of a creature, gives a unique cosmic value to the event which took place in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Thanks to the Word, the world of creatures appears as a cosmos, an ordered universe. And it is the same Word who, by taking flesh, renews the cosmic order of creation.'

Creation had waited for billions of years to achieve self-consciousness. Once this breakthrough was accomplished, the cosmos then needed to celebrate its incredible lifestory with its mysterious beginning, its hazardous evolution, its split-second timing and its relentless success. For with the advent of humanity – its new and unique heart and mind – this became possible. After the incarnation, the Eucharist is the richest celebratory expression of the mystery. And this expression has to be symbolic – encapsulated in time and space. 'Creation, like an apple, is placed on the table.' Around the table bearing the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands, through the human voices, gestures and sacramental ceremonial of its offspring, the very cosmos itself is in worship before its God, offering itself to its incomprehensible lover-God in the ecstasy of its joys and the bitterness of its sorrows. . .

Thus in a ritual in time and space, involving bread and wine and words, in one privileged and symbolic moment, the eternal significance of the mighty cosmos is carefully embraced and forever celebrated. In his prose-poem Hymn of the Universe, de Chardin moves our hearts: 'I will place on my paten, o God, the harvest to be won, this morning, by the renewal of daily labour. Into my chalice I shall pour all the sap which is to be pressed out this day from the fruits of the earth ... all the things of the world to which this day will bring increase; all those that will diminish; all those that will die ... This is the material of my sacrifice ... The offering you really want, the offering you mysteriously need every day to appease your hunger, to slake your thirst, is nothing less than the growth of the world borne ever onwards in the stream of universal becoming.' (*The Hymn of the Universe pp19-20*)

In the dynamic presence of the bread and wine on the table, we have symbolised just about everything that can be predicated of humanity, of the earth and everything in it and on it – its flora and fauna, of the universe and the cosmos itself – the past, the present and the future of all creation. All labour is therefore holy. All true work, as the Prophet tells us, is love made visible. These rich and simple elements gather up the intense flow and counter-flow of the world, its darkness and light, its failures and mistakes, its strivings and hopes, its indomitable creativity.

And then, over the bread and wine that symbolise all of this reality, the eternal words of divine disclosure and universal revelation are spoken: *This is my Body*. They sound around the earth like the angels' Christmas song and the tenebrae of Good Friday. They echo off the stars with the energy of transfiguration. They were first whispered by our Creator-Parent as the terrible beauty of the fiery atoms shattered the infinite darkness of nothingness with unimaginable flame, heat and light. And they are whispered again, a thousand times a day, in the midst of God's holy people around a table with a piece of bread and a cup of wine. This is my Body. It is God-become-atom, become-galaxies, become-universes, become-earth, become-flesh, become bread, become-everything. It is a kind of incarnate indeed Angelus of hope – a remembering, a reminding, a recapitulation and a confirming that the divine and the human, the sacred and the secular, the holy and the profane, are all God's one body by virtue of creation, first in time but revealed to us later, and once for all, in the ultimate gift of meaning, the incarnation. . .

The unfolding of the secrets of the phenomenon called life, in all its personal, earthly and cosmic dimensions, with its fearful darkness and irresistible brightness, is the bread and wine of God's universal becoming. Without the Eucharist we would surely forget that our beautiful God is very incarnate indeed

(*Treasured and Transformed pp 185,186, 190*)