

Daily Meditation 04/28/2022

Original Blessing: A Cosmic, not just a Human, Condition

Good morning. It's good to be with you this morning.

And I'm pleased that we are meditating together on the topic of Original Blessing. In my opening story, it's a tale to remind us -- a true tale, this happened more than once in my presence -- to remind us that original blessing is not just about human beings.

I think people jump on it, because well, first, they're human beings. And they want to hear this good news. And they've been hearing the other thing, that we're all original sinners, for long enough. So I understand that.

But it's not enough, because it smacks of the anthropocentrism -- Pope Francis calls it narcissism -- that has haunted us for centuries, especially in the modern era. I think, therefore I am, or humans exist, therefore, the Earth is here to serve us. And of course, this is the gateway to eco-crisis, and climate crisis: we put ourselves first. So that's why I really need to underscore that original blessing is not just about humans; we're the last ones to show up, practically. It is about the universe itself.

And I'm not alone in this. This is, well, what the Bible begins with: Genesis 1, reread it in this context, it's a cosmology. As much as it doesn't offer just the facts, of the Sun came, and then this came, and this came. But it offers a judgment, that all of it is good. Now, Thomas Aquinas says this, and I'm quoting,

In the book of Genesis, it says, God saw all things that God had made. And they were very good. Each one of them hadn't been previously said to be good. For each thing, in its nature, is good. But all things together are very good, by reason of the order of the universe, which is the ultimate and noblest perfection in things.

This is page 47 of my *Tao of Thomas Aquinas* book.

This is really important, you see, and this is why he can say later that the best thing in the universe is not the human. The best thing in the universe is the universe itself. It is our mother and our father. Without it, none of us would be here, no earth would be here, no sun would be here and go on and on.

And we know things that Aquinas didn't know: that it's been a 13.8-billion year journey on the part of the universe to bring forth a planet like ours, just the right distance from the Sun and from the moon, so there would be tides. So the water creatures, including water plants, would emerge from the waters and join us on land and so forth...not join us but precede us on land.

So this is ancient teaching, and it's biblical. And it far precedes Augustine's neuroses around sex and so forth, from which he derived his notion of original sin, which, as any biblical scholar will tell you, is not in the Bible. It's not Jewish, and the Jewish people wrote the Bible.

Now, Aquinas also says that "the first and primary meaning of salvation is this: to preserve things in the good"...to preserve things in the good. And so on the one hand, we have the goodness of things, individual things and species and the planet as a whole and the universe as a whole. But also, we need to preserve them in the good. That's our job. That's our contribution to salvation, or redemption.

And so, he doesn't just say "Salvation means preserving things in the good." He says, "The first and primary meaning of salvation is to preserve things in the good." That's a very strong way of pronouncing on salvation. And notice, he doesn't say the first meaning of salvation is to stay out of hell, or to climb your way into heaven. He's much more earthbound than that.

Preserve things in the good.

If that isn't an agenda for a time of climate change and planet destruction that we are living through, I don't know what it is: preserve things in the good. And he says, it really helps to connect to the source of goodness. What is that? Well, he says God is "sheer goodness." And

All things are good because they flow from the fount of goodness: we can praise God through all things. God bestows infinite goodness on each creature according to his unique capacity to receive it.

"Every being as being is good," he insists: that it's the whole, the cosmos, that is very good. Or the term can be translated very beautiful. So he says it is false to say that humanity is the most excellent thing in the world. It isn't.

God wills that human beings exist for the sake of the perfection or maturity, the wholeness of the universe, because the universe is what is most excellent thing of all.

These are important lessons in a time of darkness like ours, in a time of despair, like ours. In a time of our facing extinction. He is saying, Don't wallow in the darkness. Don't wallow in despair. Instead, do something about preserving things in the good.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.