

Daily Meditation 07-21-22

Why Webb Telescope is Much More than “Pretty Pictures”

Good morning.

We continue our meditations today on the beauty and deep spiritual implications of the Webb telescope, and what it will reveal to us about the universe in which we live, and the history of our universe, from which we derive entirely, taking us back 13.8 billion years to the origins of stars and the origins of galaxies. Which in turn, of course, are our grandparents, our ancient ancestors that brought us here.

And I point out that one demon we have to face is acedia. Acedia, the lack of energy to begin new things -- that's how it's sometimes defined, but it also includes ennui and depression and cynicism and sadness and boredom and listlessness, being passive, apathetic, psychically exhausted, and couchpotatoitis -- being married to being passive.

Hildegard of Bingen says that with acedia the soul becomes "weakened by the coldness of indifference and neglect"...indifference and neglect.

So until we can confront acedia, we're not in any position to have the vigor to fight on behalf of justice, whether it be eco-justice, or social justice, gender justice, or racial justice. There's a numbness and a dullness that acedia achieves in our souls that postpones doing good as they say: it postpones doing good.

So the opposite of acedia is energy and zeal and even joy. In fact sometimes acedia is defined as a sadness, spiritual sadness. There's a lot of that going around. And along with that, cynicism, which is a sourness... sourness.

But joy is a fruit of Caritas, joy is a fruit of love. And this is again one reason why Aquinas can say that the universe is here, in order that we get drunk on it, that we achieve ecstasy, which is also part of love. And he calls on the Song of Songs, which is a biblical poem of love, where the lovers talked about how they are in ecstasy with one another.

So in many ways, the lesson is that life without cosmology, a life without relationships, even bigger-than-human relationships, is a life that is lacking in energy.

The great Otto Rank, who's now being credited with being the father of humanistic psychology, died in 1939, quite young, but he says this: he says,

When religion lost the cosmos in the West, society became neurotic. And we had to invent psychology to deal with the neurosis.

And he was a psychologist, so he knows what he's saying.

When humans lose cosmology, the whole society becomes neurotic. And we had to hustle to find a medicine, which we call psychology, to which can assist some of that healing -- but turn that around! Our society can recover cosmology, which is what the Hubble telescope and much more can assist us in: the new creation story from science. Does this mean that we might be able to throw off some of our neuroses?

And we're also taught that despair often rolls in with acedia: one more reason to be alert and to be on our toes, about building up our capacities for making hope happen. Hope, a verb with its sleeves rolled up, born of the love of existence of life, of the universe, therefore, that is gifting us every day.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.