

6th Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for MFC - 31.08.2013

Yesterday I pointed out that three levels of God's work are described and sung about in the Psalms: the level of creation, the level of Israel's history, and the level that we could define as messianic, or more accurately, Christological. They are not clearly distinct levels, for the simple reason that there is only one God who works, and the work of God's love is only one work which is expressed in different shades and colors. For this reason, you may find many other levels of God's work beyond these three that I think are the main ones. Rather than "levels," then, perhaps it would be better to speak of "aspects" of God's work.

I am aware that I am simplifying a lot, and that if any biblical scholar would listen to me, maybe he would regard me with compassion. But I am not talking at an academic and scientific level, but at a "chapter" level, that is, as an abbot who tries to "sprinkle in the disciples' souls, the leaven of divine justice," as St. Benedict calls it (RB 2:5). And the best yeast that we can offer to others is that which we in our own *lectio divina*, in our own prayer and meditation, have fermented in our souls, in our hearts. Only what we ourselves receive from the Lord, from the Holy Spirit, and that we feel within ourselves is a gift of God that enlightens, corrects and stimulates our own lives, can we then propose to others as testimony. Moreover, no one is master of what the yeast received and transmitted will produce in someone else, because everyone's freedom and personal journey with the Lord is in play.

We come then to the work of God in the Psalms.

The first level or aspect is the work of creation. There are many passages in the Psalms that sing of the creation of every being, from the most insignificant to the most grand and majestic.

"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, by the breath of his mouth all their host. He collected the waters of the sea as in a flask, he closed the abyss in a storehouse. (...) He spoke, and it was done, he commanded and it stood firm" (Ps 32/33:6-9).

The whole of Psalm 103/104 is a hymn to God the Creator: "Bless the Lord, O my soul! You are so great, O Lord, my God! (...) you who stretch out the heavens like a tent, build your high houses on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you walk on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers and lightning your servant. He founded the earth on its foundations so that it will never falter. (...) You send spring water in the valleys so that it flows between the mountains (...). The birds of the air dwell and sing among the branches. From your dwelling you water the mountains, and the earth is filled with the fruit of your work. You make the grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart. (...) You made the moon to mark the seasons and the

sun knows the time for its setting. (...) How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps 103/104).

The Psalmist does not just confess that God is the Creator as he contemplates creation, he sees in it a harmony that allows him to recognize the wisdom of God. Every creature is in fact in relation to the other; every creature is made for the other, in a large design of "existence for the other" that reveals the very nature of God himself and that love is the profound nature of being.

First of all, creatures serve God, they are instruments of God: "you make the winds your messengers and lightning your servant" (103/104:4). God has no need of creatures, but creatures serve his desire to reveal himself to humanity, to enter into a relationship with each person. Creation is a "messenger" of God, it speaks of Him to us. For this reason, creation is for God's glory and joy; through it he expresses his omnipotence and his love: "May the glory of the Lord be forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works" (Ps 103/104:31).

In Psalm 18/19 as well we find a good description of the role that creatures have as messengers of God: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, there are no words, their voice is not heard, yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their message to the ends of the world" (Ps 18/19:2-5).

Creatures proclaim the work of God's hands, they announce that it is God who works. By the simple fact of their existence, creatures announce the Creator. The image that this psalm gives us of creation is beautiful. It is as if all creatures were animated by God's message; it is as if all creatures were speaking to each other, saying, "We are God's work!" This is every creature's message, all the time and in every place: the day tells the night, and the night repeats it to the day. And this message is spread from creature to creature "to the very ends of the earth."

Imagine the universe, the galaxies that humans have not yet discovered. From the beginning, without words, the stars have been announcing that they are the work of God; and they are not interested in saying anything else, because there is nothing more important to a creature, whether it be a gnat or a galaxy, than the fact that it is a work of God, that it has been made by God.

Thus the Psalms, like other parts of the Bible, give us, as it were, an awareness of the message of creation. They help us listen to the silent announcement that every creature gives to the others, continuously, endlessly. And it is always a new message. It is not that the day says to the other day: "We were created billions of years ago." Every day says to the other, and every night says to the other: "We are the work of God's hands now; we are something new, always renewed!" because God does not cease to give existence to his creatures.

Moreover, creatures serve the life and well-being of each other, and above all, the lives and well-being of humans: "From your dwelling you water the mountains, and the earth is filled with the fruit of your works. You make the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart" (103/104:13-15).

Even the moon and the sun, in their majesty and beauty, give humble service to mark the time of daily life: "You made the moon to mark the seasons and the sun knows the time for its setting" (103/104:19).

In summary, in God's plan everything is created to favor creation's harmony and beauty. At creation's center is the human creature capable of seeing and reading this design, of recognizing its Author and of being grateful to him, of glorifying him, of participating in his joy in creating the world. Psalm 103/104 begins and ends with the invitation that the psalmist addresses to himself: "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" (103/104:1, 35). The culmination of all God's works is, therefore, the relationship of blessing between God and humanity. God and the human heart bless each other, they say "well done" to each other, they speak to one other with kindness, with love, that is, they live in friendship. All creation culminates in God's friendship with the human person.

This is what Psalm 8 acknowledges with wonder: "When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established, what are human beings that you remember them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than a god, you have crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands, put all things under their feet: all flocks and herds, and even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, every creature that moves along the paths of the seas" (Psalm 8:4-9).

The work of creation amazes us with regards to ourselves. But we are humbly amazed, not proudly. For it is in pure mercy that God gives particular attention and care to human creatures, and that he gives them a pre-eminence over other sublime and powerful creatures, like the heavens, the moon and the stars, and all the animals.

We see that the Psalms help us to contemplate the creative work of God as a revelation of God himself, the revelation of his plan, his wisdom. This allows us to recognize with awe and gratitude who we are, the value that we have in God's eyes, and then to have a grateful and responsible relationship with ourselves, with our human nature.

Fr Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori OCist