JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION
Inspiring Awe & Wonder

Catholic Theological Union

6th Sunday of Easter, Year C

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Lectionary 57:

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29
Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8
Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23
John 14:23-29
https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/052525.cfm

Possible preaching themes:

- Light as communication of an event
- The longevity of the resurrection
- Time: Is it real or not?

Possible scientific resources:

- **The Theory of Relativity** is, generally, outside of the wheelhouse of theologians and preachers.
    - **In-Depth Resources:** Church historian Allister McGrath has complied an accessible introduction: Allister McGrath. *A Theory of Everything That Matters: A Brief Guide to Einstein, Relativity, and His Surprising Thoughts on God.* Carol Stream, 2019. ○ **Brief Resources:** If time is fluid, what does that mean for encounters with things past? Ingela Madfors explores this question in some interesting (and slightly Sci-fi) ways based upon physics https://www.divaportal.org/smash/get/diva2:401672/FULLTEXT02
    - This accessible article from PBS breaks this down in lay terms that are easily grasped. See: https://www.space.com/29859-the-illusion-of-time.html

- **Light** remains a topic of astronomical study, especially in how it is to be interpreted and what it means.
    - NASA runs a large website that chronicles the work of the Hubble telescope, including how one interprets data of light and spectrum https://hubblesite.org/contents/articles/spectroscopy-reading-the-rainbow
    - What is a light-year? https://www.space.com/light-year.html ○ The James Webb Space Telescope is on a mission to study the earliest stars and peer back farther into the universe's past than ever before

https://www.space.com/news/live/james-webb-space-telescope-updates

Homily outline

- **All of today's readings focus on communication**. Science itself is the practice of communicating (interpreting) data to form an explanation for why or how something observable happens, i.e. how something that has happened requires further interpretation to make sense in the here-and-now.

- **The physics of Light and Time** ○ The lights that we see in the heavens (planets, stars) are – often – the result of something that happened long ago that we are only perceiving now. For instance, the moon is 380,000km away; light emitted from it requires 1.3 seconds to reach earth. So, what we are seeing is – in effect – something that happened in the past. We are literally viewing history.
  - This means that though light travels fast, it does not travel fast enough to reflect the event as it's happening. Thus, light is always slightly late; it's appearance must be interpreted now.
  - Time, likewise, is more fluid than we once believed:
  - Einstein's theory of relativity declares that time – *an event that happened* – can only be judged according to one's frame of reference.
  - John's Gospel has long understood this, focusing not exactly on a chronological order of events, but rather what those events *mean.*

- **Theological questions:** such understandings of light and time pose significant theological questions about how something is able to reach from the past into the now:
  - Easter is just such a question: is it a thing *happened*, or a thing *happening?* Or might it be both, implying that God's grace pervades (and exceeds) time and space?
  - How does one interpret an event that happened in the past but is encountered in the present (like, for instance, observable light from an exploding star)? ○ The reading from Acts is, similarly, asking questions *after the fact* about how the community should function as a result of the resurrection for *now.*
  - The reading from Revelation concerns matters of light, communication of the living Christ, and the new creation that God is bringing to birth.
    - ✦ Direction of travel seem to matter here: the New Jerusalem is coming down to earth, earth is not going up to it.
- This has implications for the science of climate change: how the present creation is not being *replaced* but *restored* by God's proactive action. Consequentially, what is the cooperation – or rejection – of human beings in fashioning this New Creation?
- The New Jerusalem is presented as being built of precious stones. While they are beautiful to see, another point to consider is their geological *longevity.* Stone

lasts (basically) forever, just like the New Creation that uses it to fashion the Holy City.

Implications

- Like the Hubble or James Webb telescope, which exists in the present but is seeking answers to mysteries deep in the past, Christians live in the present but accept that life-giving mysteries for our redemption were revealed in the past.
- But astronomers not only recognize that the universe as a deep past, but is rapidly expanding ahead in a future that is difficult to grasp https://www.popularmechanics.com/space/telescopes/a27285469/universesurprises-scientists-with-rapid-expansion/
- Christians are missioned to live in a kind of spiritual time-warp, deeply caring about past revelations, committed to uncovering and nurturing how such past revelations are alive and powerful in the present, and entrusted with building a future so that others can revel in the enduring gift of the timeless Christ.

Tags: astronomy, light, time, revelation

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.

