

What Power!

Homily for Ascension Sunday

May 15-16 2021

C.S. Lewis' Narnia Chronicles are seven wonderful stories that I would encourage anyone here with elementary age children to read with your children. They Chronicle the adventures of six children who enter into Aslan's world, the Land of Narnia. Aslan is the Great Lion who represents Jesus. The 7th story, "The Last Battle", concludes with the actual death of three of the children, Peter, Edmund and Lucy, in a train accident in England. What Lewis writes next is one of my favourite sentences in the 7 book series:

"All their life in this world and all their adventures had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

What a way of capturing the meaning of our life and death. Everything in this life, is just like the title page. Only after this life is over will we begin chapter 1 of the Great Story where the story keeps on getting better and better. What Lewis calls "The Great Story" is what the Creed calls "life everlasting"

The Story we live is joined with the story of Jesus, who's Ascension into heaven we celebrate today.

What I want to do in this homily is to focus on a section of our appointed reading from Ephesians that helps us to understand how the Ascension of Jesus is so pertinent to our lives now. Here we have recorded one of Paul's prayers. At verse 17 we read:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him,

To come to know God involves better understanding the meaning of our own lives. Think about it this way. The life story of any individual or community gets its meaning, point, and purpose from its end. So to know what kind of story we are in, to know what is the "meaning of life", we must know our end. Don't we experience this when reading a great novel and seeing a first rate film. We want to know how it ends!

The Church tells us our end. It is one with our origin. In the words of the old Baltimore Catechism,

"God made me to know him, love him, and serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next."

Why is it that there is a universal longing for "something more" than this world can ever give us? A real "life everlasting" is the only thing that makes sense of humanity's deep, innate desire for "life everlasting", a desire that is present in nearly all times and places and cultures. We know there is life everlasting because Jesus said so and ascended to heaven. We also know there is a

life everlasting because as St. Augustine said at the beginning of his Confessions, his spiritual autobiography:

“Thou hast made us for thyself, and [that is why] our hearts are restless until they rest in thee”,

All natural and innate desires of the human heart, all desires that are found in all times and places because they come from within rather than from without, correspond to realities that can satisfy these desires: food satisfies our hunger, drink, our thirst, sleep, our tiredness, friendship, our loneliness, knowledge our ignorance. The same must be true of the desire for life everlasting. That we have a desire for life to go on after the end of our earthly life helps us to realize that it is only in knowing that God this desire can be satisfied.

Returning to Paul’s prayer. He goes onto say:

so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,

What is the hope to which he has called us? To share forever in the community of love with the saints. A fellowship where the eye of love perceives persons as intrinsically valuable, indispensable, irreplaceable. If death ends all, if life treats these indispensable persons as if they were dispensable and disposable things, if there is no inheritance among the saints:

“Then life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death knowing that all is utter emptiness.”

So says even the agnostic Ingmar Bergman in *The Seventh Seal*.

Let’s move to the next verse of the prayer:

and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

What is it we believe is the immeasurably great power in us who believe? It is the knowledge that we have spiritual, rational souls that are able to know eternal truths and to know the eternal value of love. This at least strongly suggests that we have a kinship with eternity, that we are more than merely temporal creatures. Our destiny depends on our nature and our origin. If our origin is mere matter without mind or purpose, and if our nature is thus comprised of only material organisms, atoms and molecules, then our destiny can only be material: to return to the dust from which we came.

But if we also have an immortal soul than we have access to that power whose source is in the one whose very nature is immortal. Did you notice that twice in the verse I just quoted Paul refers to this immortal power?

“immeasurable greatness of his power”

“working of his great power”

The New Testament was written in Greek. Paul uses two different words for power. When he says: ***“immeasurable greatness of his power”***, the word he uses for power here is *“dynamis”* from which we get the word dynamite. This is the power exhibited by God in creation, in what we refer to as the Big Bang. In the second instance where Paul says: ***“working of his great power”*** the word used here is the word *“Kratos”* which could best be translated as “mighty deed”. Where is the working of God’s mighty power, his “kratos”, most evident? In the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Now with this in mind listen to the next verse of our passage:

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,¹

Here we have the English word power for the third time in two verses. But you know what? In Greek, the word is not *dynamis* or *kratos*. Get this, it is the word ***energeken***, from which is derived the English word “energy”.

So do you see the connection? The dynamite that effected the Big Bang was concentrated in the mighty deed of the Incarnation and is channeled in the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus so that we now have access to this energy in our earthly lives.

How do we access this energy? Listen again to Paul’s answer:

and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe

The dynamite which effected the Universe is made available to us who believe. Our faith, is like the power line that connects this universal source to our individual lives. And as we live with a deepening confidence in the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ we can know that heaven is for real and have the confidence to know Heaven is our destiny. When people live with this kind of power they can say Amen to Lewis’ insightful words:

“All their life in this world and all their adventures had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Eph 1:20). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.