

The Single Book Bound by Love

Homily for May 28, 2022

Dante Alighieri wrote the Divine Comedy between 1301 and 1320. It is the story of Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory and then his entrance into Paradise. There is a scene in the third part Paradiso, where after his long pilgrimage he beholds the beatific vision, of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He describes it this way:

“So deep was my vision that I saw how it contains within its depths all things bound in a single book by love, of which creation is the scattered leaves.”

Here all of reality comes together for Dante bound together in the single book by love. Within the fullness of the Beatific Vision all of life's experiences will make sense because they will be read within the pages of the single book bound by love. But notice what else Dante says: “Creation is the scattered leaves.” What does this mean?

Think for a second, if you had a whole novel, one thousand pages, but it's up on the top of a mountain. It's just loose-leaf. There's no cover, no binding. And the wind is allowed just to carry the pages all over the place. And some go up into the high winds, and some go down into the water. They end up flying all over the world. Some are ripped in half. Some are covered up. Some end up in trees. And what we find here and there are little bits of it. Like, there's a page of that book. And I read it, and it makes not a lot of sense. Or I get even a half page, and it makes zero sense. Maybe I find four or five, but they're from different parts of the book. So it's not making sense. Maybe occasionally some of us get together who have found some of these sheets of paper, and we can begin to see the contours of the story.

Well, that's what life is like. As I'm seeking to understand what it's all about, I get little bits and pieces, scattered leaves. But see, within the depths of God again, how it contains within its depths all things bound in a single book by love. That's very important too. It's the divine love that's telling the story. So bound in a single book by love, of which creation is the scattered leaves. There is no solution to the problem of evil this side of heaven. How often we can ask or have heard asked “Father, why? Why is there this suffering?” Well, I mean, I don't know. I've got scattered leaves here. But in the vision of God, I'll see bound as a single book by love, of which creation is the scattered leaves.

What Dante says poetically Jesus says in veiled language in today's Gospel.

On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.¹

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (Jn 16:23–24). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

Now this is a complicated sentence that is hard to interpret because of the repeated use of the word ask: When Jesus says that on that day you will ask nothing of me, the word used for ask is the one for asking questions. Jesus is saying that on the Day of the Resurrection you will not ask questions like you have during my public ministry, where you asked say for me to explain the meaning of the Parable of the Sower. No on that day, after the resurrection the kind of asking will be requesting the Father to send to you the Holy Spirit. The word for ask here is written in the imperative meaning it has about it the sense of pleading. And when the Apostles ask for, plead for the coming of the Holy Spirit they will be asking the Father in the Name of Jesus for deeper insight into the meaning of the Book of Love that was incarnate in the God/Man Jesus. Jesus who came from the Father and is now going back to the Father will leave us the Holy Spirit. This is so we can plead and ask in the name of Jesus to see how the scattered leaves can make sense of our lives when seen in anticipation of the Beatific Vision.

What a gift it is that we can ask of the Father in the name of Jesus to come to a deeper understanding of the way of Jesus as did Aquila and Priscilla in our first reading from Acts. And while it is true that here below we do see but part of the story, it is also a grace that we also have the bound Book of Love in the 73 books of Holy Scripture, all inspired by the Holy Spirit and compiled by the Church centuries ago under the council of the Spirit. Books that tell us comprehensively of the Father's love and how Jesus came from the Father to earth so that as he has returned to the Father we too may one day follow where we will see how all of our lives are indeed bound in the single book by love.