

Angelus – Benedict XVI 2/6/2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

the Creed, which begins by describing God as "Almighty Father", then continues that he is the "Creator of heaven and earth", repeating the affirmation with which the Bible begins. In the first verse of Sacred Scripture, we read: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) God is the source of all things and in the beauty of creation unfolds His omnipotence as a loving Father.

God is manifested as Father in creation, as the origin of life, and, in creating shows His omnipotence. The images used in Sacred Scripture in this regard are very suggestive (cf. Is 40.12, 45.18, 48.13, Ps 104,2.5, 135.7, Pr 8, 27-29; Gb 38-39). Like a good and powerful Father, He takes care of what He has created with a love and loyalty that are never lacking (cf. Ps 57.11, 108.5, 36.6). Thus, Creation becomes a place in which to know and recognize the omnipotence of the Lord and His goodness, and becomes a call to faith for believers because we proclaim God as Creator. "By faith, - writes the author of the Letter to the Hebrews - we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the visible world was made out of the invisible" (11.3). Faith implies, therefore, being able to recognize the invisible, by identifying traces of it in the visible world. The believer can read the great book of nature and understanding its language (cf. Ps 19.2 to 5), the universe speaks to us of God (cf. Rom 1:19-20), but we need the Word of His revelation, that stimulates faith, so that man can achieve full awareness of the reality of God as Creator and Father. In the book of Sacred Scripture human intelligence can find, in the light of faith, the interpretative key to understanding the world. The first chapter of Genesis holds a particularly special place, with the solemn presentation of the Divine creative action unfolding along seven days: in six days God brings Creation to completion and the seventh day, the Sabbath, ceases all activity and rests. The Day of freedom for all, the day of communion with God and so with this, the Book of Genesis tells us that God's first thought was to find a love that responds to His love. The second thought is then to create a material world to place this love in, these creatures who freely respond to Him. This structure means that the text is marked by some significant repetitions. Six times, for example, the phrase is repeated: "God saw that it was good" (vv. 4.10.12.18.21.25), and finally, the seventh time, after the creation of man: "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good"(v. 31).

Everything that God creates is good and beautiful, full of wisdom and love, the creative action of God brings order, infuses harmony, gives beauty. In the Genesis it thus emerges that the Lord creates by His word: for ten times "God said" is stated in the text (vv. 3.6.9.11.14.20.24.26.28.29), emphasizing the effective power of God's Word . As the Psalmist sings: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, by the breath of his mouth all their host ... because he spoke and all things were created, commanded, and it was done" (33,6.9). Life pours forth, the world exists, because everything obeys the Word of God.

But our question today is does it make sense in the age of science and technology,

to still speak of creation? How should we understand the narratives of Genesis? The Bible is not intended as a manual of the natural sciences; it wants to help us understand the authentic and profound truth of things. The fundamental truth that the stories of Genesis reveal is that the world is not a collection of contrasting forces, but has its origin and its stability in the *Logos*, the eternal reason of God, who continues to sustain the universe. There is a design of the world that is born from this Reason, the Spirit Creator. Believing that this is at the basis of all things, illuminates every aspect of life and gives us the courage to face the adventure of life with confidence and hope. So the Scripture tells us that the origin of the world, our origin is not irrational or out of necessity, but reason and love and freedom. And this is the alternative: the priority of the irrational, of necessity or the priority of reason, freedom and love. We believe in this position.

But I would like to say a word about what is the apex of all creation: man and woman, the human being, the only ones "capable of knowing and loving their Creator" (Pastoral Constitution. *Gaudium et Spes*, 12). The Psalmist watching the skies asks: "When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place, What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them?" (8.4 to 5). The human being, created with love by God, is a small thing in front of the immensity of the universe, and sometimes, fascinated as we watch the huge expanses of the sky, we too perceive our limitations. The human being is inhabited by this paradox: his smallness and transience living with the magnitude of what the eternal love of God has willed for him.

The stories of creation in Genesis also introduce us to this mysterious area, helping us to know God's plan for man. First of all they affirm that God formed man of the dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7). This means that we are not God, we did not make ourselves, we are the earth, but it also means that we come from good soil, through the work of the Creator. Added to this is another fundamental reality: all human beings are dust, beyond the distinctions of culture and history, beyond any social difference; we are one humanity formed with the sole earth of God. Then there is a second element: the human being originates because God breathes the breath of life into the body he molded from the earth (cf. Gen 2:7). The human being is made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27). And we all carry within us the breath of life from God and every human life - the Bible tells us - is under the special protection of God. This is the deepest reason for the inviolability of human dignity against any attempt to evaluate the person in accordance with utilitarian criteria or those of power. Being the image and likeness of God means that man is not closed in on himself, but has an essential reference in God.

In the first chapters of Genesis are two significant images: the garden with the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the serpent (cf. 2:15-17; 3,1-5). The garden tells us that the reality in which God has placed the human being is not a wild forest, but a place that protects, nourishes and sustains, and the man must recognize the world not as his property to be plundered and exploited, but as gift of the Creator, a sign of His saving will, a gift to cultivate and care for, to grow and develop in accordance and harmony with the rhythms and logic of God's plan (cf.

Gen 2.8 to 15). The snake is a figure derived from the oriental cults of fertility, which fascinated Israel and were a constant temptation to abandon the mysterious covenant with God. In the light of this, the Bible presents the temptation of Adam and Eve as the core of temptation and sin. What does the snake say? He does not deny God, but slips in a subtle question: "Is it true that God said" You shall not eat of any tree of the garden? "'(Gen 3:1). In this way, the snake raises the suspicion that the covenant with God is like a chain that binds, which deprives of liberty and the most beautiful and precious things in life. The temptation becomes that of building their own world in which to live, not to accept the limitations of being a creature, the limits of good and evil, morality; dependence on the creating love of God is seen as a burden to be freed of. This is always the crux of the matter. But when the relationship with God is distorted, by our putting ourselves in His place, all other relationships are altered. Then the other becomes a rival, a threat: Adam, having succumbed to the temptation, immediately accuses Eve (cf. Gen 3:12), and the two hide from the sight of that God with whom they spoke as friends (see 3.8 - 10), the world is no longer a garden to live in harmony, but a place to be exploited and of hidden pitfalls (cf. 3:14-19); envy and hatred towards each other enter into man's heart: the example of Cain who kills his brother Abel (cf. 4.3 to 9). Going against his Creator, man actually goes against himself, denies his origin and therefore his truth, and evil enters into the world, with its painful chain of pain and death. And if all that God created was good, indeed very good, after man's free decision in favor of lies over the truth, evil entered the world.

I would like to highlight one last instruction from the stories of creation: sin begets sin and the sins of history are interlinked. This aspect pushes us to discuss that which is termed "original sin." What is the meaning of this reality, often difficult to understand? I would like to illustrate some elements. First, we must consider that no man is closed in on itself, no man can live only in and of himself; we receive life from the other and not only at birth, but every day. The human being is relational: I am myself only in you and through you, the relationship of love with the You of God and the you of others. Well, sin upsets or destroys our relationship with God, its presence destroys our relationship with God, the fundamental relationship, when we put ourselves in Gods place. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that with the first sin, man, "chose himself over and against God, against the requirements of his creaturely status and therefore against his own good."(n. 398).

Once the fundamental relationship is upset, the other poles of relationships are compromised or destroyed, sin ruins everything. Now, if the relational structure of humanity is troubled from the start, every man walks into a world marked by the disturbance of this relationship, enters a world disturbed by sin, by which he is marked personally; the initial sin attacks and injures human nature (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 404-406). And man can not get out of this situation alone, he can not redeem himself alone, only the Creator can restore the right relationship. Only if the One from which we have strayed comes to us and takes us by the hand with love, can the right relationship be re-woven. This happens in Jesus Christ, who takes the exact opposite path to that of Adam, as the hymn in the second chapter of the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians describes (2:5-11):

while Adam does not recognize his being a creature and wants to put himself in the place of God, Jesus, the Son of God, is in a perfect filial relationship with the Father, he lowers himself, becomes the servant, he travels the path of love humbling himself to death on the Cross, to reorder relations with God. The Cross of Christ becomes the new Tree of Life.

Dear brothers and sisters, to live by faith is to recognize the greatness of God and accept our smallness, our condition as creatures letting the Lord fill us with His love. Evil, with its load of pain and suffering, is a mystery that is illuminated by the light of faith, which gives us the certainty of being able to be freed from it, the certainty that it is good to be human.