

**5 Easter – Year C – May 5, 2010 - Homily**  
**Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35**  
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There has been much speculation about the new heaven and the new earth described in the Revelation to John. Eugene Peterson connects the Biblical account of Genesis with the Revelation to John saying, “The biblical story began, quite logically, with a beginning. Now it draws to an end, not quite so logically, also with a beginning. The sin-ruined creation of Genesis is restored in the sacrifice-renewed creation of Revelation. The product of these ... acts of creation is the same: the heavens and earth [are created and then made new].” We think of this as a grand future event, and in one way, we are right, yet in another, we are dead wrong. Such is the glorious paradox of living in the mystery of God’s creation and the ongoing history of salvation! We find ourselves in the intermediate period after Christ has conquered sin and death for all, but before the full consummation of that victory with the completion of the new heaven and the new earth. The ending of all, which is also the restoration and beginning of the new creation, is prefigured in the beginning of all. Eh, what did she just say? One more time! The ending of all, which is also the restoration and beginning of the new creation, is prefigured in the beginning of all. In Genesis, we read about the chaos of the waters on the earth, and in Revelation the chaos, symbolized by the sea will be no more in the new earth. In Genesis, we read of how God walks with His children, and in the restoration of the new earth, God will once again make His home amongst mortals. All life will be restored to God’s intended purpose, “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.”

Our gracious God is the God of life abundant, the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all things. God gives life and desires for all to accept the gift of eternal life by faith in Christ Jesus. God in Christ is constantly working towards creating the restored and healed new heaven and new earth. Is it hard to believe that this vision is even now, becoming a reality? When we hear on the news about acts of terrorism, cars filled with explosives left in crowded city streets, and seemingly ceaseless wars all over the world, we rightly ask, where is God in all this chaos and violence? Why do the children of men seek to kill, wound and destroy one another in the name of this or that cause, and even in the name of God?

Charles Darwin would probably have ascribed such behavior as natural law, evolution, or the fight for survival of the fittest. In fact, in the process we know as natural selection, death is a key element. In the theory of evolution, death is actually necessary for the evolution and differentiation of species, and is therefore part of the natural order of the world. The Biblical accounts of God’s creation and restoration of creation, and all of God’s life-giving gifts described from Genesis through to Revelation seem to contradict the theory of evolutionary biology. God clearly does not consider death as a natural part of His creation. Death only became part of the world after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, thereby committing the first act of human rebellion or sin against God. Christians understand Christ’s resurrection to be God’s final word and victory over sin and death, and our hope of eternal life. And in the reading from Revelation tonight we read how death will be no more. Is this then the equivalent of the clash of two titans: theology versus modern science? Do we have to choose exclusively between our faith in God and our understanding of evolutionary processes? Is science wrong, and death truly

unnatural? Is the bible wrong, and death truly part of the natural order?

There is a third way to consider, one that is more descriptive than prescriptive. Obviously, death appears to be part of the natural order in the present age. It has even become proverbial, as in Ben Franklin's quote, "In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes." But was it always so? The evidence of our faith tells us that death is not God's intention, and never has been; it is not God's design for creation, and for life. Erik Heen, a Lutheran professor of New Testament comments, "If both of these premises are true, one can only marvel at the freedom God has given, not only to human beings, but also to all creation. This freedom has resulted in a glorious universe that has life at its very heart, yet also carries within itself remarkably deep sorrow and grief." What Jesus shows us, as the Word made flesh, through His life, death and resurrection is that "the pain that comes with life as we know it, is acknowledged by God." God in Christ was once mortally wounded by our sin, yet for the life of the world He willingly gave His life so that all creation, all humanity would be reconciled to God.

To begin to answer the questions we posed earlier, God in Christ continues to stand in solidarity with us in the midst of the suffering experienced by all creation. Our violence is born of fear, especially fear of scarce resources, when God gives us all we need in abundance. You and I continue to have the opportunity to share God's life-giving kingdom by sharing our gifts in community, drawing others to Christ. By simply being Christ's Body in the world, we embody God's presence, and wherever the church is, so too is God's kingdom. The revelation to John reveals the true end and goal of all life. The destiny of all creation is to be taken up into the life of Jesus Christ. God has spoken, "It is done." The final consummation of Christ's victory over sin and death will come, and the process of this glorious transformation is happening even now. In every end, there is a new beginning. As T.S. Eliot wrote in his poem, *East Coker*, the second of Eliot's four quartets, "In my beginning is my end.... The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless. ... / In my end is my beginning." God in Christ Jesus is our alpha and our omega, both our beginning and our end.

Amen.