

Advancing our Understanding: Revelation and Science

Homily for Archdiocese of Louisville Gold Mass for Science

Monday, November 7, 2022 6:00 PM

Louisville, Kentucky

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre

Archbishop of Louisville

Wisdom 13:1-9; Luke 9:28 - 36

From the many cares and concerns of our lives, we gather here today. Today in life, time is a precious commodity, and to give some of our time to come to such a celebration as this usually means that we are aware that something significant is the focus. Our presence here states that we recognize the important reasons for being present here today. In my own thought and prayer in preparation for this reflection, I believe that the reasons that we gather here today can be divided into three.

The first reason that we gather here tonight is because the annual Gold Mass is an opportunity that is provided each year for those who are involved in the realm of scientific study, research, and other realms of the field of science to gather and to implore the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God in their individual and collective actions and deliberations that will take place throughout this year. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, for which we pray, are seven in number, and they are: *Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Courage, Counsel, Piety and Fear of or Respect for God.* With an awareness of these seven gifts and because of our prayer



Pope Francis appointed Archbishop Shelton J. Fabre as the 10th Bishop and 5th Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Louisville on February 8, 2022. He was installed as the Archbishop of Louisville on March 30, 2022. He presently serves as the chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism, and led the writing of the U.S. Bishops' most recent pastoral letter on racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts – The Enduring Call to Love", which was approved and published in 2018. He also serves on the board of Catholic Relief Services.

tonight it is our sincere desire that these gifts again be abundantly poured out by God upon all who are involved in the many aspects of the realm of science.

Another reason we gather here is because this celebration of prayer links us to those who in the past and present have enriched humanity through scientific research and discovery and have also been people of great faith, some of them priests and religious in the Church. On their part, and in Church teaching, there was and is an awareness that faith and science are not in opposition to one another. In fact, faith and science need one another. St. Pope John Paul II stated the following in a letter dated 1 June 1988 to the Rev. George Coyne, S.J., Director of the Vatican Observatory:

Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes.... Only a dynamic relationship between theology and science can reveal those limits which support the integrity of either discipline, so that theology does not profess a pseudo-science and science does not become an unconscious theology. Our knowledge of each other can lead us to be more authentically ourselves. No one can read the history of the past century and not realize that crisis is upon us both. The uses of science have on more than one occasion proved massively destructive, and the reflections on religion have too often been sterile. We need each other to be what we must be, what we are called to be.

Now I do not mean to simplify the complexities of the relationship between faith and science, but I do think the Pope gives us good insight into how faith and science are called to be in overall relation to one another.

Further, I want to state that I believe that a case could be made that faith and science progress along similar lines. For example, in our gospel today, we hear the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. This was an experience on the part of those apostles that Jesus took with him up the high mountain to experience him in his glory as Messiah and Lord. Jesus had always been Messiah and Lord, and he granted to them a glimpse of his glory. However, though Peter, James and John witnessed the transfiguration, this does not mean that they immediately fully understood the significance of what they had seen and experienced. St. Luke gives the impression that

they were silenced by it, as they shared it with no one. After the crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the apostles who witnessed the transfiguration came to a deeper understanding of what they had seen and experienced.

In like manner to the apostles, with time, discernment and prayer, the Church continues today to come to a fuller understanding not only of the Transfiguration but of all revelation, or all that has been revealed or manifested through the full example, message and mission of Jesus Christ. In theological circles, we say that though direct revelation closed with the death of the last apostle, revelation from God nonetheless continues today. Through a

deeper understanding of revelation, the Church comes to a greater understanding of how Jesus invites us to be his disciples today. This ongoing revelation serves to benefit our dogma and doctrine as we continue to strive to advance the Kingdom of God and for the common good of all. With time, reflection, discussion, prayer, and Church teaching, revelation advances our understanding of how God is active in our lives today.

In a similar manner, scientists witness and discover interesting things all the time. However, simple discovery does not necessarily mean that the significance of such discoveries are completely understood at the time of discovery. Some discoveries take time for their full effect to lead to a fuller understanding, which can then lead to inventions, which advance the common good by placing what is learned in discovery at the service of humanity. Just as some revelations of God take time to fully understand and comprehend for the benefit of faith and the common good, so some scientific discoveries take time to lead to inventions that advance the common good. In this way, we can say that faith and science progress in similar manners.

Luke 9:28–36

Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.” After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

Our first reading today from the Book of Wisdom reminds us that humanity has always been involved in the natural sciences but counts as foolish those who did so without allowing such knowledge to lead them to the living God, the origin and source of all things. The Transfiguration story reveals, as someone communicated to me, Jesus as the “wholeness of the universe”, which was the desire and search of the ancients. In God, all things, which include science and all of us, should encounter the wholeness of the universe, of life and of love. Those who do not encounter God in science are missing something foundational and significant, something that science itself reveals, as our first reading makes clear. According to our first reading, the failure to connect with God through science is

Wisdom 13:1-9

Foolish by nature were all who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing the one who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan; Instead either fire, or wind, or the swift air, or the circuit of the stars, or the mighty water, or the luminaries of heaven, the governors of the world, they considered gods. Now if out of joy in their beauty they thought them gods, let them know how far more excellent is the Lord than these; for the original source of beauty fashioned them. Or if they were struck by their might and energy, let them realize from these things how much more powerful is the one who made them. For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen. But yet, for these the blame is less; For they have gone astray perhaps, though they seek God and wish to find him. For they search busily among his works, but are distracted by what they see, because the things seen are fair. But again, not even these are pardonable. For if they so far succeeded in knowledge that they could speculate about the world, how did they not more quickly find its Lord?

unpardonable. The reading concludes with an interesting question regarding those involved in science who do not find or acknowledge God by stating, “*For if they so far succeeded in knowledge that they could speculate about the world, how did they not more quickly find its Lord?*” Therefore, another reason for being here tonight is to gather to remember and to celebrate all those scientists in the past and present who encountered the living God as revealed through science. I again thank you, who are involved in the realm of science, for your presence here tonight as people of faith.

Thus, one reason for being here tonight is to pray for the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Another reason for being here is to celebrate the faith of past and present scientists who advance the common good. The final reason that I propose for our presence and our prayer here tonight is perhaps the most important. Our presence and prayer here tonight is an expression of our utter and complete dependence on God. In

this celebration, we express and acknowledge our dependence upon God and his gifts, a dependence that has always been a part of the reality of human existence since God first created us in love. In countless ways down through history, and in many cases based on science, mankind has attempted to subvert in various blatant and subtle ways our total dependence on God, or even to call into question the very existence of God. Countless have been the ways that humanity has at different points in history and even today attempted to remove the living God from our existence. Such efforts have always led to disastrous results, and some have recognized this.

In his 1984 Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance*, Pope John Paul II stated, “...*man can build a world without God, but this world will end by turning against him [R&P #18]*”. I am certain that all of us here know the importance and the benefits of continuing to engage in scientific research, experimentation and advancement. But in line with the thought of St. Pope John Paul II, if we attempt to do this without God, in the end it will turn against us. Therefore, our third and ultimate reason for being here today is, in essence, to keep our engagement in science focused on recognizing its need for faith.

So let us pray for an outpouring of God’s gifts of the spirit upon all who are here today. Let us remember those in the past and present who have provided good example in finding the Lord and how he desires to assist us through science. In this manner, let us entrust our efforts to the living God, so that scientific research and experimentation may always be that which it was created to be, something of benefit to all, rather than something that turns against us because we have forgotten our dependence on the living God in all things. AMEN.