



SESSION 2

I Believe in God, the Father Almighty



Detail from *The Creation of the Animals*, Raphael

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- To appreciate the natural world as a work of God, the Creator, and as a place to encounter him
- To see how Scripture affirms God's transcendence and also his closeness
- To examine how the book of Genesis presents creation as a good, well-ordered, part of God's plan of salvation
- To understand that we can come to know God through reason alone but that he gives us a far better way of knowing him: through revelation and a relationship with him

STEP 1: Begin

OPENING PRAYER

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord!

— *Psalm 148:1–5*

INTRODUCTION

God, “He who is,” revealed himself to Israel as the one “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” These two terms express summarily the riches of the divine name. In all his works God displays not only his kindness, goodness, grace, and steadfast love, but also his trustworthiness, constancy, faithfulness, and truth. ... He is the Truth, for “God is light and in him there is no darkness”; “God is love,” as the apostle John teaches. (CCC 14, citing Exodus 34:6; 1 John 1:5; 4:8)

The majesty of creation can be impressive, even overwhelming—the vastness of the universe, the power of the sea, the heights of a mountain range. The natural world puts on display the mystery and power of God, “He Who Is.” Should we then fear God? As the Almighty One, he is worthy of our respect and awe—does this preclude loving him as well?

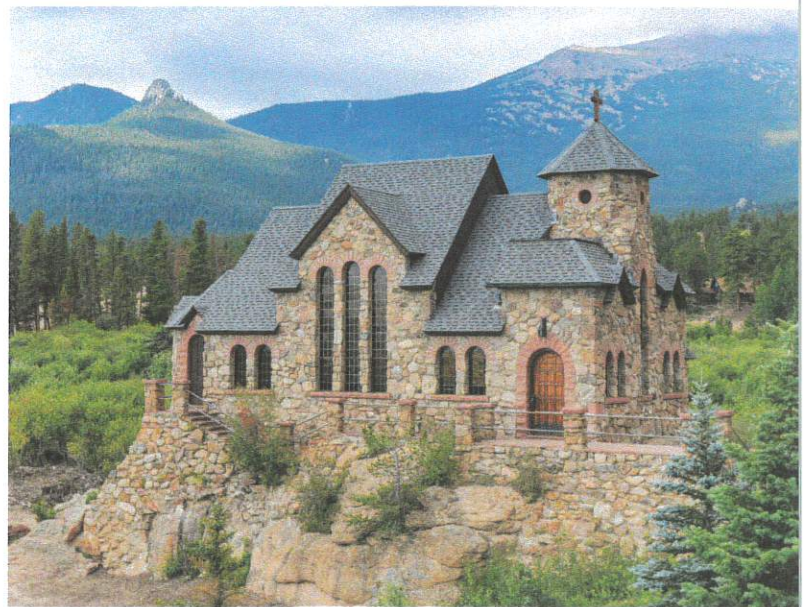
The same Almighty God also reveals himself to us as Father, and not only of creation in a general and metaphorical way. This mysterious and all-powerful God draws near to us in a special way. He calls us to be his own and to enter into a covenant of love with him. Ultimately, he invites each of us to call him Father in an intimate way as his adopted sons and daughters through grace.

This session reflects on the wonder and mystery of God, who is at the same time the Creator, all-powerful and awesome, and a Father, loving, steadfast, and kind. How does the Bible bring together the power and love of God? What does it mean to call him both Creator and Father? Does creation lead us to God, or is it just a distraction? By considering both nature and Scripture, we arrive at a vista of the God we confess in the Creed to be “the Father Almighty.”

STEP 2: Learn

SETTING THE STAGE

Camp St. Malo, Colorado—As the story goes, a shooting star fell to the ground, and when witnesses went to search for it, they found a massive rock. Among the search party, Monsignor Joseph Bosetti was inspired by Jesus’ words to Peter, “on this rock I will build my Church” (Matt 16:18). He arranged to have a chapel constructed on this spot. In 1935, construction began; and a year later the St. Catherine of Siena Chapel—known by most as the Chapel on the Rock—was completed. Today, many come to the chapel and surrounding property to encounter the Almighty in the beauty of creation and to call upon him as Father in prayer and sacrament.



Chapel on the Rock, Colorado

Creatures there are which lack spiritual life and intelligence wherewith to praise God, but they too are good, and, being assigned their places within an ordered whole, they contribute to the beauty of the universe that God has created. These creatures do not praise him

with their own voices and hearts, but, when they are contemplated by intelligent observers, God is praised through them. And, if God is praised through them, it can be said that in a way they too praise God.

— Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 148.3

God, the all-powerful Creator, is also a loving Father. The majesty and wonder of the created world is meant to draw our minds and hearts back to God. But when we confront the natural world, does our reverence lean towards fear? Or are we able to respond in love and worship to the God who created us in his wisdom and love? By considering both the book of nature and the book of Scripture, we will arrive at the truth about the God who is power and love, "the Father Almighty."

I. The created world draws our attention to God, the Creator of all

II. Salvation History: Scripture tells of God's greatness and his love

- A. God is not like us—he is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present
- B. Perfect in every way and needing nothing, he creates the world—and us—out of love
- C. God's fatherhood
 - 1. God is Father of the whole of creation, particularly of people
 - 2. He is Father, through the covenant, of his chosen people in the Old Testament, brought to perfection in the New Covenant family of God, the Church, which shows this special relationship in praying, "Our Father, who art in heaven ..."

III. Pilgrimage: Nature as a cathedral

- A. Creation is meant to lead us to God, to be a place to encounter God, our loving Father
 - 1. Nature restores us
 - 2. We appreciate the created world most when we understand its Creator
- B. Genesis teaches about creation and God, who is the Creator
 - 1. The goodness, order, and intelligibility of creation draw our minds to God
 - 2. Seven days of creation imply the covenant of love God makes with us
 - 3. The world is good and harmonious, and mankind has a special place in it
- C. All of creation tells the story of God's plan to redeem the world
 - 1. Even Jesus experiences this restoration in the Gospels

IV. Catechesis: Coming to know God

- A. We come to know people in different ways: through memory and relationship
 - 1. Memorizing Scripture and prayer is a way of knowing God through memory
 - 2. The ultimate way to know God is by being in relationship with him, like Mary is with Jesus
- B. Reason looks at creation and comes to know God indirectly, through his effects: that he exists, some of his key attributes, and that he is origin and goal of all creation
- C. But God reveals himself directly and in his innermost truth: he is Love, a Trinity of divine Persons, and our Creator and Redeemer

1. We come to know God through his revelation with the eyes of faith
2. The ultimate revelation of who God is: through the birth, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

V. *Lectio divina*: Exodus 3:1–12

- A. God appears in a burning bush; Moses turns aside to meet him—will we do the same?
- B. God reveals his divine name—“I Am Who I Am”—in a sign of trust, but also of his otherness
- C. God’s name is also a promise to be with Moses—he will be with us, too

WORD MEANING:

Creating

The act by which God, in his power, wisdom, and love, brought the universe into existence out of nothing; or the result of that act, namely, the universe, or all that exists, created by God.

The revelation of the wisdom and love of God is the first and principal end of creation. The mystery of God’s glory is realized in creation, according to the words of Scripture. “O all you works of the Lord, bless the Lord” (Daniel 3:57). All creatures acquire their transcendental meaning in the mystery of that glory. “They reach out beyond” themselves to be open to him in whom they have their beginning ... and their end.

– Pope Saint John Paul II, *General Audience* (March 12, 1986)

STEP 3: Engage

- 1) Scripture highlights various characteristics of God: his power, his knowledge, his fatherhood, his strength, his love, his punishment, and his mercy. When you think of your experience with the Bible, whether great or little, which characteristics stand out to you? Do other characteristics complement these or round out your picture of God? Does one characteristic speak to you in a special way?

Participants will have varying degrees of familiarity with Scripture, but most—if not all—will have some ideas or impressions of how the Bible presents God. Some of these may be precise and well-rounded, and others may be vague and incomplete. All of them, however, have a place in this discussion. The idea is first to acknowledge how our thinking about God has been shaped by Scripture up to this point through, whether helpfully or unhelpfully. Then, bringing in different viewpoints from Scripture can help to complete or round out the image of God we have from Scripture. One reason the Bible uses so many descriptions and images of God is because he transcends any one easy description. As we grow

Leader

(continued on next page)

in familiarity with the many descriptions of God, we come to understand better who God is, rectifying our misunderstandings and developing our correct impressions. Finally, after acknowledging our past impressions of God and forming a more complete picture alongside others, we can find it fruitful to contemplate whether a particular image, term, or description of God touches the heart right now. This is a beautiful thing to take to prayer: to ask the Lord how he wants to speak to us here and now through this image or characteristic.

- 2) People have always had the experience of being in the natural world and feeling both wonder and vulnerability. Does either feeling correspond to your own experience? How can each reaction turn our minds and hearts to God?

This question could divide a group into the outdoorsy types and the non-outdoorsy types. Although this might be humorously acknowledged, the main point is that both feelings are appropriate and many will, in fact, experience both, even simultaneously. More important is the second part of the question: how can feelings of wonder and vulnerability, or helplessness, become openings for turning to God? Wonder is usually only a short step away from beauty and gratitude. The saints often experienced all of these in their contemplation of nature, as Saint Francis of Assisi famously embodies. In this way, the value of appreciating the natural world is emphasized: the natural world speaks of God and of his glory, and our response to this can be a beautiful way to draw closer to God, through thanksgiving, appreciation, love, and worship. As for vulnerability or helplessness, this feeling taps into a basic intuition that the world is a very big place; we are not in control, but God is, and we need his help. This is the foundation of all prayer: having the humility to realize our place in the world, and to understand that we are unable on our own to do all that we need to do and to become all that we are meant to become. In this way, these two primordial experiences of the natural world can be powerful starting points for drawing closer to God, praying to him, giving him thanks, and offering him worship.

Leader

- 3) We come to know God in two main ways: through natural reason and revelation. Does one way appeal to you more than the other? What is the place of each in Christian life?

Although knowing God through revelation is by far the superior way of coming to know him, some people still might be drawn by what natural reason is able to attain on its own. Why might this be? For some, it could be that there is comfort and security in knowing that the faith has a reasonable basis: God exists and we can know this by reason alone. For others, there might be an apologetic motivation: arguments against certain false positions can be made effectively. Still others might simply be amazed by what reason, under the tutelage of the best philosophers, can come to know. Ultimately, however, this knowledge falls far short of what we can know by revelation. Perceiving this, some might be drawn to knowing God through revelation because of what it enables us to know about God: he is triune, he sent

Leader

(continued from previous page)

his Son to save us, etc. These are indeed remarkable truths to be savored and loved. Others might pick up on how personal and intimate this mode of knowing God is. Finally, there are some who will distrust reason and for this reason will be grateful for God's assistance in coming to know him. While a distrust of reason isn't necessary, appreciating God's condescension to assist us is certainly warranted. As for the place of each in the Christian life, it is ultimately based on one's faith. While reason is a gift from God, it can only get us so far. We must fall back on our faith to believe what God reveals to us and to apply it to the highest things; furthermore, the apologetic role in defense of the faith is indeed an important part of the Christian life, though the place of argument need not be exaggerated. Revelation is the indispensable means by which we come to know God as he is in himself. It is a gift of mercy; it is the best and surest way of coming to know God. It is the foundation of saving faith and the whole edifice of the Christian life. Finally, it is the firm foundation of Christian prayer, the path of which is always illumined by the revealed truths of the faith.

STEP 4: Conclude

To step into the natural world is to step into the temple of creation. Nature is meant to be a place of encounter, where we meet God in his mystery, in his power, in his love, and in his mercy. It is where we encounter "He Who Is" also as "He Who Is With Us." This is the remarkable picture that Scripture presents to us. God created the world out of love; and because of his love for us, he invites us to enter into a covenant with him.

He knows us and he wants to be known by us. That is why God has given us the gifts of reason and revelation. Through reason we know about him, and through revelation we can learn to know him and enter into a relationship with him. The God of the universe does not remain distant and unapproachable; he draws close and invites us to live in friendship with him. This God is all-powerful, but he also wants to be our Father and our friend. How will you respond to God, the Father Almighty?

CLOSING PRAYER

I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name for ever and ever.
Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name for ever and ever.
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.
One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.
On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

Men shall proclaim the might of your
awesome acts, and I will declare
your greatness. ...
The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in mercy.
The Lord is good to all, and his compassion
is over all that he has made.
All your works shall give thanks to you, O
Lord, and all your saints shall bless you!

— Psalm 145:1–6, 8–10

MEMORY VERSE

The God who made the world and everything in it,
being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines
made by man. ... Yet he is not far from each one of us,
for "In him we live and move and have our being."

— ACTS 17:24, 27-28

Commit

CALL TO CONVERSION

It isn't easy today to accept God as the Father Almighty. Awash in abundance, technology, and power, the world is not inclined to admit weakness or need. Nor is it inclined to depend on others. Broken hearts and broken relationships lead the world to frown upon relying on others and encourage us instead to smile at self-sufficiency, go out alone, and achieve happiness on our own.

But these approaches exaggerate our abilities and our positions in the world and they become a kind of pride. To counter this attitude, we have to cultivate humility—the truthful appreciation of who we are, our place in the world, and the things we are and are not capable of. Only with humility can we acknowledge God, the Father Almighty, and come to love him.

He is the Almighty One who created the world and each of us in it. We owe our very being and our lives to him; any good we have in this life is ultimately because of him. Humility acknowledges this. It leads us to give thanks to him, to love him for these gifts, and to worship him as Almighty.

He is also our Father, who calls us his own and invites us into a covenant of love with him. He wants to give us every good gift, more than we could have imagined. This requires admitting our insufficiency to attain these things on our own; it requires confessing our need for him and for his fatherly love and help. Humility does this too. It leads us to turn to him, to rely on him, and to love him as the father we have always wanted but have never perfectly known in our earthly life.

Where do you see pride and humility in your life? We do well to look to our actions rather than our thoughts. Do we carry on with our lives as though God doesn't matter, as though we don't need him, as though he doesn't exist? Or do we admit our shortcomings, see our failures, and realize that we need God in every moment to help us and to be a father to us? Ask the Lord to help you to become more aware of your pride so that you can uproot it to grow in the humility that leads us to love our Father Almighty.

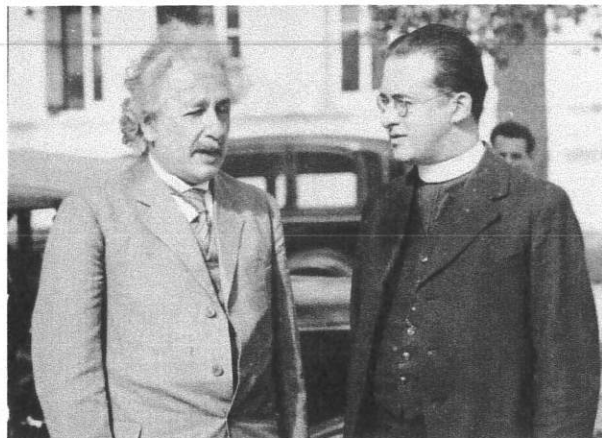
DIGGING DEEPER

The Bible presents a view of Creation and the Creator that is filled with insights and rich in wisdom, but these texts are ancient and can sometimes seem primitive in the face of modern discoveries. The apparent contrast between biblical wisdom and modern science raises important questions for the believer.

The *Catechism* offers a key principle to help us think about the relationship between faith and science. It affirms the harmony between them, pointing out that it is one and the same God who gives us reason, who reveals himself to us, and grants us the gift of faith. It then goes on to say, "Methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God" (CCC 159, citing *Gaudium et spes* 36). Truth cannot contradict truth, no matter what the field of knowledge, for God is the cause of all truth and of our discovery of it.

This foundational principle gives confidence to the believer when such questions arise. It doesn't mean answers will always be easy or immediate. Some things remain difficult and obscure. These require our patience and trust, as those charged with scientific inquiry and theological research seek the truth that harmonizes the two perspectives on the world.

The *Catechism* mentions these two perspectives in relation to Creation and evolution (see nos. 282–284). The teaching on Creation has to do with the most important questions about who we are, our origin, and our destination. Genesis answers these questions by offering a theological counternarrative to other Creation accounts circulating at the time it was written. But Genesis



doesn't offer a scientific theory about the world, a theory counter to the scientific theory of evolution. Such theories are the work of science, whose studies "have splendidly enriched our knowledge of the age and dimensions of the cosmos, the development of life-forms and the appearance of man. These discoveries invite us to even greater admiration for the greatness of the Creator" (CCC 283). Not every theory about creation will be acceptable, of course; ruling out the spiritual dimension would be false and would go beyond the legitimate perspective of science. But various theories can harmonize with what the faith teaches about man and his ultimate origins in God and his love.

FOR FURTHER READING

Genesis 1–2, Psalm 148, and John 1

Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 198–227 and 268–314

Scott Hahn, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, chaps. 1–2

Joseph Ratzinger, "In the Beginning ...": *A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, chaps. 1–2

Frank Sheed, *Theology and Sanity*, chaps. 10–11