

Sirach 324:1-2, 8-12; Psalm 147; Eph 1:3-6, 15-18; John 1:1-15

The prologue of John's Gospel, is a rich, and complex Christian hymn, with re-occurring statement and statements on the nature of Christ, which Fr. Francis Moloney observed, to be like '*the motion of a wave running up the seashore each section carries the same message farther.*'¹

I find that to be a very useful image to grasp the effect of John's language. I can picture myself on the beach watching the waves gently roll in, and hear the sound they make. Each wave similar to the one that preceded it, but rolling further up the beach towards its destination. I guess John, being a fisherman himself, would have been very used to the motion; the sound; its very smell.

The fisherman John turns his eyes from heaven and writes at the behest of the Holy Spirit:

In the Beginning was the Word,

St Hilary of Poitiers expands: '*Years, centuries, ages are passed over, place what beginning you will in your imagining, you can grasp it not in time, for He, from Whom it is derived, still was.*'² St Chrysostom also helps us: '*As when our ship is near shore, cities and ports pass in procession before us, which on the open sea vanish, and leave nothing upon which to fix the eye; the so Evangelist here, taking us with him in*

his flight above the created world, leaves the eye to gaze in vacancy on an illimitable expanse... eternal and infinite essence.'

And the Word was with God,

The Word was with God. Word with a capital 'W'. Not the Word was 'in' God, which could mean that the Word somehow reduced to the content of an idea, and then expressed in an utterance, or an intention made intelligible, but 'with' God, not to be confused identically with God. The Word is a separate Person. The Word is not made, but has always existed with God, and never separate and never confused. This is not a lack of precision on the Evangelists part, as is made clear in his next words:

And the Word was God.

Here any sense of uncertainty in the mind of the listener that the Word might be 'merely' the '*the voice, of the expression of the thought.*' of God. *No, the Word is God by Nature.*³ We can grasp what seems incomprehensible: God, and the Word of God are two different persons, but share the same nature.

*He was in the beginning with God.*⁴

Having begun with this proposition, St John returns to it now, emphasising the precise, eternal & divine nature of the one of whom

¹ Moloney, Francis, J, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John*, p34

² Hilary 'de Trin in St Aquina, 'Cantena Aureo: St John chap 1 ver 1. I have paraphrased into more modern English.

³ Ibid

⁴ John 1:2

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John's Gospel is concerned: the one who is united to the Father , as a flame is united to its heat.⁵ The Word is about to enter the stage.

The whole piece of the prologue lays out the context - the fundamental truth - in which every word of Gospel, every parable, every encounter with Jesus that follows is supposed to be read and understood. It is well worth spending much more time than we have now to read it again, and slowly, allowing the words to penetrate into your mind. Read it aloud to yourself, or read it to someone else, or have them read it to you while you close your eyes and nurse a mug of tea.

We are just at the tail end of our liturgical celebrations for the Birth of Jesus, with the Epiphany this coming week. But it should not be the end, should it? It should be just the beginning. It should be the measure of everything else we do in life and how we prioritise them; how we approach our attendance at His church and receive the sacraments; how we evaluate the exigencies of life and give them requisite attention; how we amend our course; how we tame our tongue, and guard our appetites... everything, just like St John and every saint after him!

'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory'

The roll of a wave reaches our feet, and rushes over them, murmuring word and eternity. As it retreats, and then seems to gather itself for

another roll up the beach, we look up and set my gaze upon the immense expanse of the sea. And, we are in awe. We should carry that awe in our hearts and gaze now for the rest of the year.

⁵ Analogy of St Augustine.