

## Trinity Sunday: Shelbyville, IN

My name is Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB. I am a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, and I teach Old Testament in our Seminary and School of Theology. One of the courses that I teach is on the psalms which was the hymn book of the Second Temple. On the one hand, I try to explain to students some of the ways that Hebrew poetry works so that they can enjoy it for themselves. We also look at some of the important ideas that shape the psalms.

The responsorial psalm for today, Psalm 8, has some of the hallmarks of Hebrew poetry which likes to repeat either exactly or the same idea in somewhat different words. Psalm 8 for instance begins and ends with the same line:

O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!

I ask students if the line means exactly the same at the beginning and the end. Their first reaction is to say yes, but eventually someone will want to qualify that and say that the second time is somewhat different because of what the psalmist has said in between.

In the middle part of this psalm, we hear the psalmist say:

When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars which you set in place —

Usually moon and stars are mentioned with the sun, but here the sun is missing, and this is the clue that the psalmist is looking at the night sky. I presume it is a clear night, and there are no lights anywhere, and the psalmist is looking at beauty and wonder of the night sky. Ancient peoples spent more time with the night sky than most of us do, and they were familiar with various constellations also the way the sky turned in the night. Exactly why, they did not understand.

Still the psalmist has a sense of the largeness of the sky.

All of this causes the psalmist to say in the next two lines which somewhat repeat:

What is man that you should be mindful of him,  
or the son of man that you should care for him?

The Hebrew word ‘man’ is ‘enosh and refers to humanity, and the phrase ‘son of man’ is ben ‘ādām – child of Adam. So we might translate this as

What is a human being that you should be mindful of him or her  
or the children of Adam that you should care for them?

The psalmist understands that compared to the sky we are small, yet though we are small, God is mindful of us. God who must be larger than the sky still, the psalmist asserts, is aware of us. Though the psalmist feels small standing beneath the night sky, the psalmist asks why God should remember us or care for us.

In the next stanza, the psalmist asserts:

You have made him little less than the angels,  
and crowned him with glory and honor.

We have been made “little less than the angels” according to this translations. The literal Hebrew says: me‘aṭ mē’elōhîm – a little less than gods. Either way we are wonderfully made and “crowned with glory and honor.” The psalmist goes on to say:

You have given him rule over the works of your hands,  
putting all things under his feet:

This particular line points to Christ as we hear in the Letter to the Ephesians:

And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things  
to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in  
every way. (Eph. 1:22-23)

We know so much more about the night sky than did this Hebrew psalmist. We know that the Milky Way is our own galaxy. The diameter of the milky way is estimated as being between 150,000 and 200,000 light-years and containing 100–400 billion stars. The milky way is just one of billions of galaxies.

What is a human being that you should be mindful of him or her  
or the children of Adam that you should care for them?

You have made us little less than the angels, a little less than gods,  
and crowned us with glory and honor.

Today is the Feast of the Blessed Trinity. If the sky is mysterious and wonderful, our God who is mindful of us and cares for us is also mysterious and wonderful. St. Augustine says that God the Father from all eternity has a perfect thought, a thought so perfect that the thought was itself a person, the second person, and the bond between the first and the second was perfect love, a love so perfect that it was also a person, a third person, and so our wonderful and mysterious God is three in one and one in three. Today we celebrate this mystery of our God who is mindful of us and cares for us, a God who has made us little less than the angels, little less than gods, and so we are able to appreciate the wonder and majesty of God.

Some people, I find, miss this sense of mystery and wonder. Maybe I misjudge them, but they seem to make everything only as big as they are, only as large as their own understanding. It seems to me that they fail to see the mystery. By mystery I do not mean puzzle; rather the mystery transcends our ability to put all of this in our little box. The mystery demands that we have the humility to acknowledge what is larger and more wonderful than our own infinitude. The mystery demands that we be people of praise.

O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!

I teach in a seminary. I teach students who are studying to be priests. This past semester I had a course in psalms on the weekend for lay students and deacons pursuing master's degrees in theology. We also go out to diocese and teach those preparing for the diaconate. This coming week we will have more than a hundred teenagers with us learning about prayer and liturgy, a program called One Bread, One Cup. There is also Abbey Caskets which sells simple wooden caskets to people. We have lots of things going on at Saint Meinrad.

I want to say just a word about the seminary given everything that is going on in the Church. I began working in our schools in 1982, and we have grown in our understanding of seminary education over those years. We built on a good foundations, but certainly we developed our program over the last forty years to better prepare students for priestly ministry. Saint Benedict in his Rule for monks says those preparing for this life “should be told everything hard and difficult whereby one goes to God.” We work hard to do that because we want students to be real and realistic.

We have a fine group of seminarians. You have one with you this summer: Seminarian Jose Neri. He was in my little class on Church Art and Architecture. There are many other fine fellow like him. Several years ago I had a young man in my prophets’ class from Bloomington Indiana named Michael Keucher. He always seemed to have a big smile on his face. In that class I make them write poems so that they have some sense from the inside about the workings of poetry. He wrote a poem called:

### Grains of Glory

I see them  
     speckled on the page  
     sketched on the screen  
     standing on the ceiling  
     soaring in the sky

Everywhere they're  
     dancing and dazzling  
     mingling and moving  
     spinning and swinging  
     twittering and teasing

I can't escape them, these  
     armies of atoms  
     spots of space  
     dots of delirium  
     grains of glory

Mike Keucher

I think that fits with my homily. You will receive a letter this week with more about Saint Meinrad. For some people it is important to support this work. If you are one of them, I thank you on behalf of Fr. Archabbot and the community. I ask that all of you pray for us and our work. The best thing that you could do for us is send us a student. We will send them back to you for service. Look around this community and see if there is someone who could serve. People who come to the seminary often say that they came because someone asked them.