

THE WEDDING FEAST OF CREATION, OLD AND NEW.

“They are like the angels in heaven, and they are children of God.” Luke 20:36

My favorite image of angels is from C.S. Lewis' book Perelandra, the second of his space trilogy. In that book, one of the central figures, Elwin Ransom, sees two angels. One is the masculine angel of the planet Malacandra. His planet is a calm, cool and ancient place that reflects stability and order, where even the trees are of living stone. And he holds a sword and shield, guarding this venerable heritage. The other angel is feminine and her planet, called Perelandra, is a fresh, tropical paradise, with mountainous waves and floating land. She holds her hands open with what seems like a cornucopia of foods, reflecting the fruitfulness of her garden-like land. Seeing them, Ransom suddenly realizes that there is a masculinity and femininity, not only in the human race, but also in all of creation. That is why, in languages that divide their nouns into masculine and feminine, certain words, such as sun, sky and fire are almost always masculine, while other words, such as land, water, and earth are almost always feminine. Lewis did not mention this fact, but St. Francis' famous Canticle of the Creatures likewise divides creation along masculine and feminine lines, with such phrases as “Brother Sun,” “Sister Moon,” “Brother Fire,” and “Sister Water.” Even in English we have such a distinction. When we refer to the general person, we tend to use the masculine pronoun “he” or such words as “man” or “mankind.” By contrast, when we refer to a specific thing we love, such as a land, a ship or a university, we tend to refer to them as “she.” This difference may reflect the fact that men tend to think more in the abstract, and thus excel more in such fields as engineering and math, while women tend to think more about the specific situation in front of them, and thus tend to excel in such fields as nursing and elementary school teaching, where individual attention is more needed.

As there is a masculinity and femininity in creation, there also a masculinity and

femininity in marriage, which is, according to Genesis 1, the high point or creation. For when Adam and Eve, the male and female of the human race, come together and receive God's call to be fruitful and subdue the earth, they bring creation to completion. Genesis 1 ends the creation accounts with a reflection on marriage saying, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to a wife and the two become one flesh." (Gen1:24) In short, marriage brings the masculine and feminine elements of all of creation together to fulfill this goal. If modern science is to be believed, it makes the story all the more beautiful, for it indicates that, for billions and billions of years, God slowly formed the universe and the earth to give it as a wedding gift to this first couple and to their children until the end of time. The order between man and women, and through them in all of creation, in turn finds its source and summit on the seventh day, the day for the worship of God.

And the devil, when he wished to destroy this order, he attacked both the worship of God and marriage. For, in addition to persuading Eve to be suspicious of God, he went after her when Adam was absent or at least silent. And, after the first sin, the first effect is that Adam and Eve hide from God, and the second is that the marriage starts to disintegrate as the couple are embarrassed in each other's company and Adam blames Eve. And, from that time onward, the attack on creation and humanity consistently involved an attack on marriage as polygamy and divorce become acceptable and fornication and adultery become rampant, as the prophets and the historical books of the Old Testament indicate.

And so, when Jesus came to bring about a new creation, He would have to reestablish the ancient institution of marriage as well, for that was the summit and the controlling principle of the first creation. Thus, when the Pharisees ask him about marriage, He referred back to "the beginning" and reestablished the ancient law regarding the indissolubility of marriage as central to His new creation. (Matt 19:8-9; Mark 10:6-9). But, as is so common in His new creation, Jesus did not merely restore what had been damaged; He raised it higher.

For He raised marriage to the level of a sacrament and a symbol of His kingdom by taking the Church as His bride. And this renewal of marriage was meant to be a part of the renewal of all of creation, as reflected in the messianic prophecies that promise a new creation in which the land is fruitful and the wolf is the guest of the lamb. See, e.g., Isaiah 11:6-9. And it is noteworthy that Jesus' first and last miracles, involving the water and wine at the wedding of Cana and the catch of fish at the Sea of Galilee reestablish the earth once again serving mankind.

Because it is now the greatest marriage, the spousal love of Christ and His Church in turn sanctifies the spousal love of marriage, and through marriage the masculinity and femininity of human society and all of creation. But Christ did not wish this spousal love to be invisible to future generations. And so, now that Christ has ascended into heaven, those consecrated in the Church reflect the masculinity and femininity of this spousal love. In particular, priests and religious men are, on behalf of Christ, mystically espoused to the Church. And religious women are, on behalf of the Church, mystically espoused to Christ. Or, in a related context, Mary, on behalf of all women, brought Christ into the world in the Incarnation. And the priest, on behalf of all men, brings Christ into the world in the sacraments and especially in the Eucharist. And so Mary is the mother of all of Christ's people, and priests are the fathers. To focus on a third context, although both the Marian and Petrine sides of the faith must be present in each person, priests particularly maintain the institutional Petrine role in the Church preserving order and stability, while religious women particularly make present the Marian role of prayerfulness and maternal love.

Of course, the world, the flesh and the devil continue to be at work to destroy this order in creation, in marriage, and in the Church. The Church endures attacks from within and without, the institution of marriage struggles for acceptance, and creation groans, eagerly awaiting redemption. (Romans 8:19-22) It is noteworthy that most of the false ideologies of

the twentieth century, from communism to consumerism, have resulted in a simultaneous attack on the priesthood and religious life, on the family, and on creation. This drama of history will continue until the end of time, with the spousal love and order of the kingdom of God on the one side and the envy and chaos of the devil on the other until Christ comes again to take the Church fully into heaven as His Bride, fulfills all marriages in the great heavenly wedding feast, and through this glorious, everlasting wedding establishes the “new heavens and the new earth.” (2 Peter 3:13; Revelations 21:1-2)

The fact that all marriages will be fulfilled in the one great marriage at the end of earthly time does not make them less important, but more so. For how a person lives out spousal love on earth, whether directly in marriage, or spiritually in another vocation, crucially affects how and whether he will be able to participate in this final wedding feast. If a person has rejected spousal love on earth, he has not prepared himself to enjoy the final reality. By contrast, all of those who have lived out spousal love in their vocations will find their life on earth to have been a preparation for the great love that will fulfill this earth and be the setting for the new heavens and new earth. Therefore, “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God.” (Matthew 5:8.)