

Lord make me know your ways

The little parable at the heart of today's gospel speaks a truth about human nature; that it is contrary and easily swayed by influences that distort any "absolute" value of right and wrong, good and bad, true and false. If you think about what may constitute an "absolute" value, and ask people how they view such a notion, then you will most likely receive a response which begins: well for me personally... Immediately everything becomes subjective and the understanding that there is an "absolute" value of good, of truth or of beauty more or less goes by the wayside, and remarkably enough, with it goes the idea that "conscience" can any longer hold us to account when such questions confront us. Whether this is good or bad is important because if the concept of an "absolute" value has been built on a false premise, then the concept should not stand.

The premise of which I speak is this: that our world, our universe, indeed the whole cosmos, has a purpose rather than none, and that, as created beings in this cosmos, we share in the ultimate living out of this purpose. Such a proposition causes us to ask certain questions about the "mind" behind the cosmos and its creation. Surely, this "mind" must stand outside the creation and as such must be, to a degree, both inaccessible and unapproachable? All of these questions are real and valid, and asking them must of itself in some way be built in to the creative act, since for the purpose of the cosmos to be meaningful and comprehensible, every contingency, every possibility must exist in the "mind" of the creator at the instant of creation, including the creator being and becoming a part of the creation in order that we can come to know and experience this "mind" with all that this implies.

In today's second reading St Paul quotes from what is believed to be an early Christian hymn. No-one knows who wrote it or when it was composed, but the concept it grapples with is absolutely (no pun intended) vital to our relationship with the "mind" of God, because unless Jesus *emptied himself from his equality with God*, his living amongst us as one like us would have been a sham. Our attitude towards him, our feelings about him and our knowledge of him would have been a lot different if he had appeared amongst with all encompassing knowledge and a mind fully formed. The fact that Jesus came amongst us as a baby with needs and wants, and grew into a child with trust and faith, maturing into adolescence with hope and ambition before finally achieving adulthood with responsibility and conscience, means that he grew in knowledge and understanding of the values that make the world function. It also means that he experienced how those values can often be distorted and misconstrued.

By assuming the condition of a slave, Jesus experienced just how far we are capable of going when it comes to distortion and misconstruction. His acceptance of our human nature with its capacity to flaunt the values of falsehood, evil and wrongness and set them up in opposition to truth, goodness and right, brings him to the ultimate human judgment about what is or isn't "absolute" in the world. When Pilate scornfully asks Jesus *what is truth*, he holds in the balance a judgment about our values and we know for Pilate which way the scales tipped. But the "mind" of God upholds another way. *That God raised him high...* tells us that our concept of "absolute" can never be subjugated by that which seeks to undermine or weaken our conscience. The life we have, the world we inhabit, the cosmos in which we exist is sustained by the "mind" of the creator who holds us all in his hand and in the words of the psalmist *shows the path to those who stray*.