

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

If you were at the Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols last night or watched it online, you heard me begin with a philosopher's question. "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" As I said last night, some philosophers answer "No. it doesn't make a sound," because sound isn't sound unless it is heard. Similarly, some people claim a god isn't God if He cannot be perceived or observed. We dispatched this objection to the true God last night, for the true God, born of the virgin Mary, was foretold, was set concretely in time and space, and was observed by mother and father and shepherds. And He was proclaimed by angels as the Savior of all people, Christ the Lord.

Last night, you heard me concede, for the sake of argument, those philosopher's point that an observer is necessary. But today, I take it back. Today, I'd like to explore this question a bit more, using the Gospel text from St. John, for it lays bare the foolishness of these answers. Bear with me. This is one time not "to be like Mike" (Mike Hollman that is), even if you, like he, have decided you know the answer.

Philosophers do debate such questions and try to give answers. Of course, for this question, defining sound to be the compression of air waves that is heard, makes the answer to the question trivial. Of course, then the falling tree makes no sound — by definition, if no one is there to hear. Wouldn't that be nice, if whenever someone poses you a question, you could just change definitions to suit your answer. Life doesn't work that way for most of us.

But there's an even more fundamental problem with the idea that something does not exist if it is not perceived, or that something does not happen if it is not observed. That problem is that it places man, if you will, at the center of the universe. In this virtual world the philosopher has created for himself, man is the creator; he establishes reality. "I heard the sound, so there is sound" — a corrupt echo of creation. This is crass idolatry — the created imagining that he is the Creator.

But thanks be to God that in the Church we do not have to mire ourselves in obtuse philosophies but rather we are enlightened by theology, by the clear word of God. Indeed, that word from the pen of the Evangelist John thunders from eternity in our Gospel: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" John clearly points us back to the words that Moses uses to begin the account of the creation: "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*" (Gen. 1:1). These words clearly put the creation in the domain of God, not man, and that puts creation in the domain of the Word.

Repent, therefore, all you idolaters who think that you are the center of the universe, that all things revolve around you! Such arrogance is not becoming of a

creature, let alone a believer. We were not there when the Lord “*laid the foundation of the earth.*” We were not there when He “*determined its measurements*” and “*laid its cornerstone.*” We were not there when He “*shut in the sea*” and “*made clouds*” to blanket the earth (Job 38:4-11). God was there, the Father with His hovering Spirit and His Word, as John testifies: “*He was in the beginning with God*” — in the beginning, at the creation, and “*All things [came to pass] through him, and [apart from him not one thing came to pass]*” (translation from William Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, p. 91).

Yes, the Word was not only with God in the beginning, but the Word was also operating in God’s domain in the beginning and showing Himself to be God Himself. “*The Word was God.*”

Thus John gives answer to the foolish idea that something is — that something exists — only if man is there to perceive it. John makes a clear distinction between the Word who “was” in the beginning and the things that came to pass through Him. And it didn’t take a man to observe it to make it a reality. When God the Word said, “*Let there be light,*” ... *there was light*” (Gen. 1:3). When God through His Word placed the greater and lesser lights in the sky on the fourth day, it was so, even though man was yet to be created and did not observe it (Gen. 1:14-16).

And when John proclaims that the Word already was in the beginning, that, too, is so. The Word of God existed before the foundation of the world, “of the Father’s heart begotten ere the world from chaos rose” (Prudentius, “Of the Father’s Heart Begotten”). As John would later record from the Word’s own mouth, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*” ... “*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*” (Rev. 1:8).

Thus, John juxtaposes the Word who is and always was and the Word who causes things to come to pass. Here our own Bill Weinrich argues that John is not talking exclusively about the creation, not even primarily, when he says, “*All things came to pass through him, and apart from him not one thing came to pass*” (again, Weinrich), but rather he’s talking about “the relationship of God with mankind in His self-revelation” (Weinrich, p. 136). That is, John is speaking about the things that have to do with our redemption through Christ. Thus, John continues, “*what has come to pass in him was life, and the Life was the Light of men*” (Weinrich, p. 91).

What the Word came to do was to give life, not just in the creation, but in the recreation. This is why “*the Word became flesh,*” that we might have life. This is why God gave His Son, that we might not perish but have life. This is why we are begotten of God through water and the Word and made His children, that we might have life. This is why we listen to this Word, that we might have life. This is why we look to the Word and believe in Him, that we might have life. This is why we follow the voice of the Word, our Shepherd, that we might have life. This is why we lose our life in

contrition before Him and repentance, that we might have everlasting life. This is why we eat the flesh of the Word and drink His blood, that we might have life.

The Word became flesh that He might lay down His life for us and take it back up again — that we might live. The Word became flesh that we might not walk in darkness but live in the light of life. For death could not defeat Him who is Life, who came to bring life to pass, who came not to condemn but to save; and darkness could not snuff out the Light of the world, who shines the light of Life into our darkness, that we might follow His Light unto everlasting life.

The Word became flesh that in seeing God's Son, and looking to Him, we might come to know the ultimate reality, the Father Himself who is unseen, and have eternal life, as Jesus said, "*this is eternal life, that [we] know [the Father,] the only true God.*" And we know the Father only through "*Jesus Christ whom [He] sent*" (John 17:3). The Word became flesh that the Father might draw us to the Son, that we might believe in the Son, that we might come to the Father and see Him as He is, and in that eternal reality live with the Son in the Father's bosom.

For finally, it is not seeing and hearing, observing and perceiving, that makes reality. Rather reality is — God first and then all things that come to pass through Him. Reality is God's Son, the Word, who was and is and is to come. But hearing does lead to believing; believing leads to knowing; knowing leads to life; and life leads to the beatific vision, seeing God again face to face.

So, come dear children of the Word. He is favoring you today not only by this word proclaimed but by the table He has prepared for you — grace upon grace. Their power is not perceived by eye or ear, but are nonetheless very real: the Word's Divine flesh given for you to eat, His blood once shed for you to drink, forgiveness unseen but bestowed. Come and have communion with the Father through His Son. Eat and drink and rejoice in your life granted by the Word of God made flesh.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.