

Hello Everyone, It's nice to see everyone especially on this celebratory occasion. The recognition of the completion of all requirements for the degree and program completion always comes at the end of July, really at the height of summer, not quite close enough to the start of Fall classes to feel as though it is just around the corner, and just at the end of summer classes and exams, when they are about to fade into a (hopefully) happy memory. It seems like a moment when the year seems to pause, and time seems briefly suspended, as though searching for an insight, as though laboring in vision, seeking some moment of revelation, "hieratic and profound," to use Flannery O'Connor's expression from her story of the same name ("Revelation"). Can we yet glimpse it? Before the season turns (or even the week-end) and we are back in the press of daily worries and pressures? What is it?

"What am I loving, when I love you? ... when I love my God?
I put my question to the earth, and it replied, "I am not he";
I questioned everything it held,
and they confessed the same.
I questioned the sea and the great deep,
and the teeming live creatures that crawl, and they replied,
'We are not God; seek higher.'
I questioned the gusty winds, and every breeze with all its flying creatures told me,
'Anaxamenes was wrong: I am not God.'
To the sky I put my question, to sun, moon, stars, but they denied me:
'We are not the God you seek.'
And to all things which stood around my senses, I said,
'Tell me of my God. You are not he,
but tell me something of him.'
Then they lifted up their might voices and cried,
'He made us.'
My questioning was my attentive spirit
and their reply, their beauty" (*Conf.* 10.6.9).

Isn't it an intuition of beauty that labors for articulation in this moment of contemplative pause, as we look back on labors and accomplishments, and look forward to new challenges and opportunities? We feel the moment as an immense gift, and as the memory and summation of many gifts, gifts both given and received, gifts of learning, of teaching, of struggle and growth, of insight, of companionship, of completion and anticipation. The intuition that labors for articulation in the moment of awareness of such gifts is simple: "He made us." The awesomeness of the gift of creation, of the gift of ourselves, ourselves as gift hits us as we taste the depth of gratitude – gratitude to family, to friends, to teachers, to colleagues and students, and in and through that gratitude, the insight groaning for articulation, the vision laboring to be born, the thought just coming to the surface: "He made us."

Friends, don't you think that evangelization, at its heart, is always living in the moment of that insight groaning for articulation, of that vision laboring to be born, and the thought just coming to the surface, "He made us!" For this is the moment of

profoundest gratitude and in this moment aren't we ready to say, "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!" (Ps. 148.1-4). "Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name" (Ps. 30.4). If in our own hearts, we live in this moment of gratitude, we will be able to teach it to others and to help them live there too. This moment of being able to say Thank-you, and of realizing there is actually someone to say "Thank-you" to for everything that we are and everything that is – isn't that the most profound moment of evangelization? To realize that the meaning of Christian life, and the meaning of life in general, is ever learning to say Thank-you better? Of course this presupposes, for the teacher and the preacher, that he or she knows all of the teachings of the Church that permit one to grasp more fully and more profoundly the One to whom thanks is given – I hasten to add, as you've just completed two years of studying these very things – but the essence towards which this all tends and the vision out of which it comes is this simple vision laboring to be seen, the thought struggling to rise, the insight searching for articulation, and then the joy of being able to say "Thank-you!" "Thank-you so much" and, "I love you!" and know that it is heard.

Thanks everyone! With best wishes to all -- JC