

Second Week of Easter Homily
April 28, 2019
Deacon Scott Zogg

A few years ago, Pew Research did a survey to assess American attitudes toward science and religion. In the survey, Pew found that 59% of Americans said that they thought that Science and Religion were often in conflict. That number was 55% for people who identified as Catholic. When asked if science conflicted with their own personal beliefs, 36% of Catholics said that it does. Other surveys have shown that this perceived conflict between science based on human reason and religion has caused many people to question and even leave their faith.

In our Gospel reading today, Thomas is presented with testimonies to Jesus' resurrection from his fellow apostles, but Thomas was slow to believe. He wanted physical evidence of Jesus' resurrection before he would be willing to accept it. Much like the sceptics today.

So an important question for our day is this, "Is there a conflict between science which is based on human reason and our Catholic Christian faith?"

If there is, I stand before you today a deeply conflicted person. Growing up, my Father was a professor in the Medical School at the University of North Dakota teaching physiology and doing research. In fact, my whole family was always very strongly oriented to math, science and technology. My oldest sister grew up to be a PhD physicist. My two brothers became physicians. My other two sisters and I went into technology and became engineers. Though we all grew up with a love for science, doing science projects and talking about scientific questions and the natural world, we also had a deep and committed Catholic faith, which all of us still practice. Quite honestly, growing up, I never saw a conflict between the two, because I always saw science and my faith through divine revelation as two different and complementary tools to discover the truth of life and the world.

As it turns out, our Catholic Church has never seen a conflict between faith and science either. As far back as the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas, the angelic doctor, who more than anyone else, influenced the Church's teaching from his day to the present, was a man who loved and sought the truth from whatever scholarly source it might come. He has been quoted as saying "whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit"

In 1870, the dogmatic constitution from the first vatican council said, "there can never be a true divergence between faith and reason, . . . [because] the truth . . . [could never] contradict the truth."

In Pope St. John Paul II's 1998 encyclical Faith and Reason he described faith and reason as "two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth"

There is no conflict because science and faith are two complementary tools to discover different aspects of the truth. Science is a tool for discovering physical truths about the material world; matter, energy, time and space. Things that can be studied by repeatable experimentation. Faith is a tool for discovering truths about the transcendent the meaning of our world; love, beauty, what is moral, what are we here for. Things that can not be subject to experimentation, yet are essential for living a meaningful, fulfilled life.

An analogy could be made to a meteorological description of snow and a poem about snow. Both express truths about snow but they reveal different truths. One is not more truthful than the other.

That is why I can stand here today and say to you unequivocally that I believe everything that our Catholic Church holds and teaches to be true and at the same time tell you that I also believe in the scientific process for revealing truth over time through repeated experimentation and observation.

So if there is no conflict between science and our faith, why is it that so many people seem to see a conflict. There may be a number of reasons. Maybe some people do not understand the Church's teaching on scripture or misunderstand certain doctrines and dogmas. Maybe some people attribute science things that science has not proven.

But I think that one of the main sources of confusion today is a number of vocal opponents of religion who have a very heavy presence on the internet and social media and who advocate a philosophical worldview that says that all that exists is the material, that is, matter, energy, space and time. This philosophical worldview has sometimes been called scientism, scientific materialism or simply materialism. It is a very cold and empty view of the world. It leaves one without a true source of meaning or purpose. The rise of this worldview has brought with it a dramatic rise in feelings of meaninglessness, depression and tragically, even suicide.

The ironic thing, is that this materialist worldview is not actually scientific. Let me explain. Foundational to science is the scientific method (which by-the-way was developed in the monasteries of Europe in the middle ages). The scientific method starts with observation, from which the scientist makes a hypothesis. The hypothesis is not necessarily thought to be true, but the scientist designs and conducts experiments to test the hypothesis. The results of these experiments refine the hypothesis until it eventually becomes a theory. Over time as more and more scientists conduct experiments that theory becomes stronger and more certain. The irony is that the worldview of scientific materialism does not follow the scientific method. There have been no observations, there has been no experimentation there have been no experimental results and yet, those voices espouse this worldview loudly and sometimes even sarcastically and derisively proclaim it to be true, even "scientific". Yet it is only their entirely unproven belief!

On the contrary, while there is not absolute proof of God in the material world, there is an amazing volume of strong evidence of which it would take hours to just scratch the surface. The Gospel accounts themselves and corroborating evidence from the first century. The lives of the early members of the Church and martyrs including the apostles who knew Jesus and witnessed the Gospels in person. The lives of saints and 1000's of miraculous and unexplainable phenomenon that have been thoroughly documented, critically examined, and scientifically studied through the ages. All of these give evidence for the truth of our faith.

We don't have to check our reason at the door! Bring it with you to Church. As Jesus told Thomas in our Gospel today, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." In the end, we need both our minds and our hearts, our reason and our faith. Both are gifts from God and it is by using both that we come to believe and enter into that intimate relationship with God, Our Maker, that we are made for and that fulfills us.

In a little while, we will be given the opportunity to receive Jesus Christ himself in the form of bread and wine. We will truly receive Him, some of us for the first time, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity! Can we receive Him using both our minds and our hearts and enter today into a deeper relationship with our risen Lord, saying with Thomas, "My Lord and My God!"