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## Seeing the World Through Faith

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## Seeing the World Through Faith

### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.



From our Guest Writers

### ***SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH FAITH.***

As a teacher of mathematics, I never cease to be amazed over the marvelous patterns of numbers reflected in the world. One outstanding example is the Golden Mean generated by the Fibonacci Numbers. It can describe the breeding of rabbits; the surface of a pineapple; a sunflower's spiral florets; the architectural framework of the ancient Parthenon; and the proportion of the human body, to name a few. How can *one* mathematical sequence of numbers describe properties of so *many* radically diverse material things in nature and in human works?

For believers in God, the ultimate answer is found in our divine Creator. The OT Book of Wisdom says: "For all men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan" (Wis. 13:1). St. Paul later wrote: "Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity have become visible, recognized through the things he has made" (Rom 1:20).

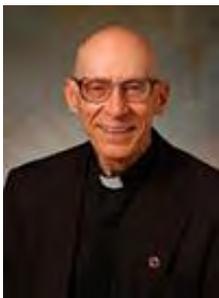
This leads us into the theme of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Verbum's* first publication: *Seeing the World through the Lens of Faith*. It coincides providentially with the *Year of Faith* announced by Pope Benedict XVI on October 11, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In his Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei* ("the door of faith"—Acts 14, 27), the Pope wrote: "Faith is the lifelong companion that makes it possible to perceive, ever anew, the marvels that God works for us. Intent on gathering the signs of the times in the present of history, faith commits every one of us to become a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world. What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end." (Section 15)

Besides viewing the world through the lens of mathematics to see signs of the divine, I try to incorporate the same principle in my writing and preaching of sermons. Over my 52 years as a priest, I have found it helpful for myself and for my listeners to prepare a homily in three parts: first, introduce the scripture with a story, illustration or current event; second, explain some of the biblical text in simple terms and without getting too technical; third, apply the text to one's personal life and to world issues. The introduction serves not only to get the congregation's attention and to arouse their interest, but also to connect it with the Scripture of the day. This connection is crucial. Certainly the word of God stands on its own merits as a compelling force on the minds and hearts of people. Nonetheless, for that word to release its full power within people, they have to see how it is relevant to their lives. To give God's word a chance to transform people, we have to show that the word is both reflected in and throws light upon what they experience every day, and that the word is alive and active here and now for them.

If we skim through the Gospels, we see that Jesus himself used examples from the real world to reveal the mysteries of God's presence and action among his people. When speaking to people, Our Lord looked around for familiar images with which to frame his parables and teachings. He referred to vineyards and wheat fields; to birds in the sky and lilies on hillsides; to a Prodigal Son and a housewife searching for a lost coin; to the changes of weather and to water in a well; to farmers sowing seeds and to shepherds taking care of their flock. Through these common world experiences, Jesus raised questions for the people to ponder, elevated their sights to higher values, or challenged them with reversals of their expectations.

On the one hand, when we view the world, we still see so much sin and suffering, evil and violence, and poverty and injustice. It's easy to get discouraged and question the goodness of God. On the other hand, if we make every effort to *See the World through Faith*, we will see that there is so much more kindness and grace, virtue and caring, sharing and helping. In looking for introductions and examples to connect with the Scriptures, we can find wisdom and inspiration in **literature** written by Plato and Shakespeare from the past, and by Tolkien and Chesterton in more modern times. The same is true of **music**. An ancient hymn such as *Panis Angelicus* or a contemporary one such as *On Eagle's Wings*, or even a popular song as *You Light up My Life*—all these can easily fit in with some biblical text. An epic **movie** like *The Ten Commandments* or a more recent film like *The Tree of Life* is avenues into such faith topics as salvation history or the after-life. Again, through great works of **art** in sculpture and paintings, we can benefit from the artist's insights and genius, whether it is Michelangelo's *Pieta* from the Renaissance period or Salvador Dali's *Last Supper* from the modern era. We could continue with different ways of viewing the world through the eyes of faith in areas such as poetry, theater, television, Internet, technology, science, medicine, advertising, industry and entertainment, but we will leave that for your own explorations.

We close with a final note from a collection of essays titled, *In the Company of Preachers*. In her contribution to this collection, Sister Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P., suggested that the preaching of the Gospel has to connect somehow people's ordinary experiences with the movements of grace throughout salvation history and indeed in their own hearts: "The role of the preacher is to bring to the Word the depth dimension of the mystery of human existence as God's self-offer of love through interpreting that experience in the light of the Scriptures, the liturgy, and the whole of the Christian tradition, and thus draw hearers of the Word into a deeper relationship with God which is, at the same time, a deeper experience of their everyday human life and relationships as graced." What Sister Hilkert said about the "role of a preacher" of the Word, applies also to the "vocation of every disciple" striving to "live" by the Word.



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