

God is great! Amen! (Amen). Our psalm today says, "Awesome is he, beyond all gods. For all the gods of the nations are things of nought, but the LORD made the heavens." Finally, it says, "Give to the LORD glory and praise; give to the LORD the glory DUE his name!"

I've been reading Trent Horn's book, "Answering Atheism," in an effort to learn how to respond to those who struggle to see the greatness of God. This book has helped me go back to the foundations of our faith and realize how incredibly awesome God really is.

Much of the book talks about our quest, as human beings, to understand how the world came to be. WE believe, as today's psalm says, "The Lord made the heavens," and as the creator, He existed long before the universe was created, even before time began, if you can wrap your head around that.

Science plays a big part in understanding the origin of the universe. Trent says in the past 50 years, scientists have discovered that there are six constants and conditions that make up the laws of nature. Even a slight variation, in any one of them would have spelled disaster for life, as we know it. A few examples include the weak gravitational force, the strong nuclear force at the atomic level, and the slow rate of expansion of the whole universe. He says, "the odds of our universe being finely tuned [the way it is], is comparable to the odds of getting 50 royal flushes in a row!" These are odds with a number that has 190 zeros. So, if nothing else, praise the Lord for getting it right, otherwise we wouldn't be here today.

Now, let's look at how God continues to interact with his works of creation in the examples described in today's readings. In our reading from Isaiah, we hear the calling from God to Cyrus. "I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not." What's not obvious about this calling, is that Cyrus was not a Jew, and the prophet who wrote this part of Isaiah, really went out on a limb to call Cyrus out as an "anointed one" the same word used for messiah. However, with this calling Cyrus defeats Babylon and returns the Jewish people to their land of Judah. He pays to rebuild the temple and the city, and restores the Jewish community.

Even though at first, he does not know God, Cyrus responds to God's call and plays a major role in building up the kingdom of God on earth. Cyrus has a policy of allowing people exiled by Babylon, to return to their homelands and have freedom of worship. His kingdom becomes greater than any thus far on the planet. Think of how our world would be different if world leaders followed God's call for peace and justice?

In the second reading from St Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, we see another example of God calling people to perform His will. Thessalonica was a capital city with a port, at the end of a major trade route with many people trading goods from around the known world. When Saint Paul arrived during his second journey, he preached the gospel in the local synagogue for

three consecutive sabbaths. He converted Jews and many Greeks, including women of prominence. His success caused the Jewish leadership to become jealous, and they arrested Paul, and he was forced to escape from the city at night. For this reason, the Thessalonians faced heavy persecution, but as we see in the reading, Paul affirms their successful, "Work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord." As a result of their efforts, the Spirit of the Lord was spread throughout the world by the many visitors present in the city.

These stories of God's creation and his work throughout biblical history speak to God's greatness, but how do we deal with apathy in our hearts and the hearts of others asking the question, "Why should we pay attention to God?"

First, God helps us in our struggles. He knows us intimately, every cell in our bodies, and every thought in our minds. He knows the struggle of being human as Jesus came to earth to understand the human condition. God helped Cyrus literally CONQUER THE WORLD, He can help us find peace in our world, knowing, more than anyone, how it came to be this way.

Another answer is, God is all about helping us find joy. Let's think of the best people in our lives, the people we heavily rely on, and the great memories we've had with them. God was there. God IS love, patience, kindness, and all the things we enjoy in our most treasured relationships.

Think of our most beautiful encounters with nature, like walks on our amazing beaches and hikes in the grand Sierra Nevada mountains. God was there too, He formed the earth and the plants and animals that we so enjoy.

We all have God moments, where we look back and say, "God made that happen." It's more difficult to look forward when we're suffering and feeling hopeless, and believe God will with come through for us again and again, but He will!

My final answer to, "Why pay attention to God?" is out of recognition for God's gift of life on this planet. God has been creating the universe for 13 billion years. To put it into context, think of the earth as a cruise ship, sailing through space. If a cruise is the length of one lifetime, then we are on the eighty THOUSANDTH cruise since man was created. That means Jesus and the Thessalonians sailed only 27 cruises ago and King Cyrus built his empire just 7 cruises before that. My point is, we live in a small sliver of time. During that time, we need to do as the psalm says, "Give the Lord glory and honor" for His work of CREATION, and PARTICIPATE in building of His kingdom just as Cyrus and the Thessalonians did.

We are blessed with an AWESOME God, AND a calling to keep His Spirit alive on the cruise ship of life. As we move to join the captain at his table of the Eucharist, let's find ways in our lives to, "Give the Lord the glory due his name."