

Raise your eyes and look about . . . you shall be radiant at what you see . . .

I live alone now. At my advanced age it has been hard to get into what we call the Christmas spirit – especially as nightfall arrives so early – and things get dark – and Jane lives in assisted living. And so it was with little of such spirit that I arose on Christmas day to drive to St. Leo's to attend its 9:30 AM Mass. I usually arrive at the parking lot around 9:10 in a diagonally marked place facing the grass plot along the paved road past the rectory – and just sit. Lately I sit there unmindfully, directly in line with that golden tree standing so erect upon the lawn. It does catch my attention – even though not my thoughts. I'm not sure what kind of a tree it is botanically speaking – except that even at this late date of the season it rises as an explosion of gold leaves rising above a carpet of its own golden leaves lying at its base. In other words: it's gorgeous.

And then the thought came to me: that tree wouldn't be there; it wouldn't exist, if I were not here looking at it. Indeed, nothing would be there, not even the earth or the sky or the stars above would be there if it weren't for us human beings being here. Think of it. If nobody with eyes to see and ears to hear and senses to touch tenderly or roughly, there would be nothing. Things would be there but – in a sense – unseen as by us human beings, who would otherwise know they are there? Rabbits and birds and tigers might see sky and creeks and trees and other animals – but in instinctual ways. They would not “know” them as anything but shelter and sustenance; there would be no universe, nothing universal about their “knowledge”. A globe with no one like us human beings to experience it as we do would disappear as far as any meaning is concerned. As the Book of Genesis says: In the beginning . . . the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss. And you could say that's how it would still be if we human beings hadn't arisen from the ground of which we're made.

So it dawned on me what philosophers already know: that it is we human beings who, by way of our unique senses, minds, and imaginations bring this otherwise invisible, inaudible, fascinating world into being there for us to see, to touch, to inhale, to question and learn so much – and admire and wonder why – and come up with writings we call sacred and poetry and science to live a life of mysteries un-concealed. To say nothing of the language we speak which allows me to name that sunlit thing - a “tree”! To give names like grass, leaves, sky, clouds, birds . . . to draw things out into an identity they did not have and then to add adjectives like: beautiful, green, golden, tall, majestic – as well as adverbs: things to be treated respectfully, carefully, usefully, not cheaply and selfishly. And whence comes this language we utter? Our tradition says it comes from the very Source of what and who we are, as a power to name creatures, to tell as in the tolling of a bell the astonishing story of this world in which we live.

Except that over time, we tend to forget the co-creators we are; we abuse our powers of intelligence and speech and treat all that variety of beings as only “things” to use and abuse – in other words fast reducing them (by hyper-technology) to a nothing that's actual! . . . as say a forest gone, a city bombed, a species erased, a people too much at odds to care about their responsibility to care for things and each other – in loving detail – like that golden, almost adorable tree.

Geoff Wood