

MARKING SACRED TIME: THE “FUTURE” AGE HAS ARRIVED

“This is the year 2020. The place is the Challenger Sea Mount – the top of an underwater mountain, a complex beneath the sea.” This was neither a dream, nor was it high drama. It was the opening credits in a Hanna-Barbera **cartoon** I watched in 1972 entitled “**Sealab 2020**.” While not nearly as cool as “The Thunderbirds,” (now I’m **really** dating myself) the program featuring marionette puppets along with scale model special effects, Sealab was a chance for this nine-year-old to think about the future. What will the future look like? To those who do not remember (it only ran for a partial-season), Sealab was an underwater research base of 250 men, women and children who fought off sharks and giant squid. It was futuristic, but with the most basic animation. But what I most recall was wondering what life would **really be like in 2020** when I would be in my– yikes– mid-50’s!

Well, that time has arrived. What can we say for ourselves? I am aware of but one **underwater research laboratory**, appropriately named Aquarius Reef Base and operated by Florida International University. It is a steel cylinder divided into three compartments, sitting in a sand patch adjacent to the deep coral reefs of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. It can accommodate up to six people in just 400 square feet of living and working space. Cozy indeed! It would make a submarine feel like a spacious mega-cruise ship. So yes, the cartoon was overly ambitious. But it still calls to mind our penchant for **dreaming**, for looking into the future and **wondering** what might happen. The human person is hard wired to think, to dream and to be filled with awe and wonder.

We heard the Christmas Proclamation beautifully chanted at Midnight Mass. It is taken from the **Roman Martyrology**, ancient in its origins, but revised and republished at the turn of the 21st century. The text begins with creation and **situates the birth** of Jesus in relation to major events and people, both of sacred and secular history. It begins, “The Twenty-fifth Day of December, when ages beyond number had run their course from the creation of the world.” In its course, the proclamation notes the one hundred and ninety-fourth Olympiad, the seven hundred and fifty-second year from the founding of Rome, the forty-second year of the reign of Octavian Augustus, etc. Jesus was born in a specific place and time. The bottom line– “God is with us.” And He is with us in time, though he is Lord of all time.

Does the Church teach that time is the fourth dimension? Could we believe that as Albert Einstein postulated, time is essentially another dimension, alongside of height, width and breadth? In short, there is no definitive teaching on such matters from a Catholic perspective. What the Church **does** teach (cf. Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 A.D.) is that God is eternal: “We firmly believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God, **eternal, infinite** (*immensus*), and unchangeable, incomprehensible, almighty and ineffable, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; three persons indeed, but one essence, substance or nature entirely simple.” (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 202, my emphasis added). So, what on earth is eternity?

Have you ever attended a performance that you deemed “interminable”? I recall attending a **solo** concert by a virtuoso cellist. About 40 minutes into the performance the man who invited me uttered an audible stage whisper to his wife– “It’s like watching paint dry!” I tried my best to swallow my laughter. The word means without end, literally. It is so **difficult** to conceive of God **without beginning or end**– we come face to face with our **limited understanding** of such terms. **St. John Paul II** gave us food for thought in one of his General Audiences, teaching that God’s “eternity...must be understood as the indivisible, perfect, and simultaneous possession of an unending life, and therefore as the attribute of being absolutely “beyond time” (John Paul II, *Audience*, Sept. 4, 1985). In 2 Peter 3:8 we read: “But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day.”

In his speech at the Areopagus, (Acts 17:28) St. Paul teaches, “For ‘In him we live and move and have our being,’ as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’” He who is the Lord of all time, came to save us in time and to **redeem time**. In time past, God spoke through the prophets, but now in this Christmas season, He speaks to us through His son. (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2) As we enter into what surely sounds like a futuristic new year, **what place** will we give to the Lord? How will we embrace 2020 such that God

remains active in our lives? How can we be more present to Him this year? Though God the Father remains outside of time, His Son humbly entered into time. And he did so in order to redeem it. May *Anno Domini* **2020** truly be a **year of grace** and mercy as we seek to draw closer to Jesus, Lord of all time. Please join us for Mass on January 1, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. What a beautiful way to honor our Lady and usher in the New Year.

- The Immaculate Conception Cathedral in **Bahdida, Iraq** may soon be restored, following being set on fire in 2013. Once used as a shooting range by ISIS, the Church located 20 miles southeast of Mosul (constructed in 1932) will be restored thanks to the great work of *Aid to the Church in Need*. This is a worthwhile organization to support. More importantly, it signals that sufficient stability has been regained such that the people are confident they can move forward.
- **Spoiler alert.** After reading reviews about the new film “**The Two Popes**” I’ll take a pass. It paints a tired ideological portrait. In a series of **imagined meetings** between 2005 and 2013, Pope Benedict XVI is portrayed as a rigid reactionary and the future Pope Francis as a reforming revolutionary. Get the picture? I’ll stick with classic films that eschew obvious political or theological bias. Truth be told— I never tire of the 1965 classic “The Sound of Music.”
- On Holy Family Sunday, I pray for all our **parish families**. May God grant you peace and tranquility amidst the frenetic pace of life. May God’s healing grace come upon all families experiencing trials of any kind, including the pain of separation or divorce.
- I doubted I would ever see the day that the **Golden Gophers** would play in a meaningful **January 1 Bowl** Game. Granted there are a total of **40** bowl games this year! While **not** the Rose Bowl, the **Outback Bowl** is a big step in the right direction. The Gophers face the 9th ranked Auburn Tigers at 12:00 Noon on Wednesday in Tampa, FL in a Big Ten-SEC clash. Go Gophers!
- A special word of **thanks** to all who helped to prepare the Church for our Christmas liturgies. The **decorations** are stunning and the **music** has helped us lift our voices to God in praise. So many labor behind the scenes (flowers, cleaning, decorating, sacristans), and our servers, lectors, ushers, EMHC’s all pitch in to assure that everything runs smoothly. God bless them all!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel
Rector