

Twice in today's gospel Jesus states, "they do not belong to the world anymore than I belong to the world." The fact that it's repeated word for word like that highlights its importance. But why is that statement so important? What is Jesus telling us?

In order to get a true understanding of the truth Jesus is giving us today, we need to figure out what He meant by "the world." Just what is the world? Does he mean the planet? Here I'll give you a visual—here's a globe. Showing us the earth and all it holds. Is this what Jesus means by "the world?" I don't think so. Jesus knew the scriptures and knew that in Genesis it states "then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." (Gn 2: 7) On Ash Wednesday we are told to remember that we are from the earth and will return to it. So I don't really think "the world" for Jesus meant the earth.

So what was he referring to? Sometimes when we encounter a word in scripture like this—a word which has a meaning that is hard to fully know—it's helpful to go back to the original language that was first used. In this case Greek. The Greek word that is being translated as "world" is "cosmos." That's helpful. It's not without its own limitations, but it certainly can get us closer to what I believe Jesus is trying to tell us.

Let's clarify a few points on this word as well, because "cosmos" is also multivalent in English. The term originally meant "order—especially a good order" or "orderly arrangement." And now, for scientists—especially physicists and astronomers—the word cosmos has a meaning along the lines of - the universe as seen as a well ordered, harmonious system. In fact, to them, this—the earth is a very small part of the cosmos. Important but small. In a sense this is helpful to understand. When we were young—very young—infants and such. Our world—our cosmos—consisted of the family and our first home, For the most part it was well ordered and worked as a system with adults and children carrying out various functions. Then it expanded to include neighbors, then

classmates, distant relatives, and so on. And even now, our world continues to expand via travel and technology. In fact, we are getting ever closer to having the human world—our part of the cosmos—expand beyond this planet through space travel and exploration. This is just one way in which our understanding of science and its terms can help us understand theology. The cosmos as the well ordered system of all of God’s creation—heaven and earth. In fact, in recent years a new strain of theological study has emerged called “the new cosmology” that attempts to incorporate our growing understanding of the size and scope of the universe and what that means in light of the fact that the incarnation happened here on this tiny little planet. It’s no longer simply a question of why did the incarnation—God becoming man happen in the middle East and why not say—North America, or East Asia, or Northern Europe? But why, here, on Earth and not some other planet or solar system? But that’s a question one of you can work on later. I’ll just accept it as a mystery.

Now, even though Jesus said we don’t belong to the world—cosmos. He also said he’s not asking God to take us out of the world. Why not? Fortunately, for all of you, we’re here at a Benedictine school and monastery. The call to monasticism in medieval times used to be called in Latin “fuga mundi”—translated as “flight from the world.” So monks have grappled with this notion of our relation to the world for a very long time. How do we be in the world but not of the world, how do we be separate from the world but still care about all of God’s creation?

Again, if we look at the meaning of cosmos as a well ordered system—I think Jesus is telling us that we are not of the cosmos—we are not cosmopolitan, because we do not follow that system. We do not order the world and all of creation the way others do. Our system is different now because of our relation to Jesus. The world’s ordering of creation is based upon possessions, prestige, and power. Christ has freed us from those. A cosmopolitan ordering of our world based upon possessions, prestige, and power is subject to human failures and abuse. We know those all too well. Failings with possessions leads to theft, greed, jealousy, and corruption. Failings with prestige and power lead to

division, hatred, racism, sexism, and all forms of other abuse. Our new life in Christ means we step out of the existing system of the world based upon individual human dominance and enter a system of relationship to all things in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ.

On Thursday we celebrated the Solemnity of the Ascension. A feast that at its heart celebrates the breaking open of the cosmos to us all. As stated earlier, we know we are dust and to dust we shall return, but the feast of the Ascension reminds us that we will not remain dust. That is not our final destination—Jesus Ascended into heaven forging the path for us to do likewise.

I want to leave you graduates with one last thing. And it's actually a physical gift. Underneath your chairs are little black boxes. Inside that box you will find a stress ball in the form of a globe. That is my gift to you. When your world seems to be falling apart—and there will be times when it will—when you need to expand your world to make room for new ideas and new relationships. Give this ball a little squeeze and remember that you do not belong to the world. As it says in the closing lines of today's gospel Jesus has something more in store for you,

**As you sent me into the world,
so I sent them into the world.
And I consecrate myself for them,
so that they also may be consecrated in truth.**

To consecrate means to set apart. And so you are. You are set apart from the world's system and given to the truth. At another point in John's gospel Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The Ascension shows us the way, you are now set apart in truth, and destined for eternal life with God.

You will always be welcome back here. May God bless you and remain with you for the rest of your days.