

**May 24, 2006**  
**7:00am Homily by Rev Timothy A Leitzke**  
**(1 John 5:1-6)**

Today we honor Nicolaus Copernicus and Leonard Euler, scientists. The Church has often found itself at odds with science. Science reveals something new and Christians pit God against it. This is odd because the God pitted against science is usually a God *invented* by a scientist. The God that gets the most press today is the God of Isaac Newton, who needed some smoke and mirrors to balance his equations. Without a God his flawed math wouldn't work. His God was cold, predictable, and most importantly of all was the creator of the universe. This is not the God revealed in Christ. The God in Christ is warm—sometimes hot with passion—decidedly unpredictable, and most importantly abides with us and promises us new life. Copernicus and Euler are commendable if for nothing else than for granting us a greater understanding of the world in which God abides.

A greater understanding is helpful to us in many ways, one of them being our reading of scripture. For example, today's reading from 1 John says, "whoever loves the parent loves the child." We could read this and think, *Hmm, yes, yes, how wise scripture is!* We see the parent in the child. We see

the genetic imprint. We see the gestures and expressions acquired. We catch the idiosyncrasies. Yes, we see the invisible God in Jesus the Christ. We experience God through this person. St John writes that Jesus speaks only the words that the Father has spoken to him—in other words, that Jesus comes with the Father’s expression and sayings. We see the parent in the child. I, however, cannot help wondering, *Do I really like the children of people I like? There has got to be someone I like whose kids I cannot stand!*

We’ve done a lot of looking at 1 John in Weekday Spirituality. We can tell a lot about it by reading it closely. We can guess with confidence that it was written at a time of conflict in a localized city congregation where the Gospel of John was read. There were people saying that they were now free of Sin because of Christ and that they did not have to love the poor and helpless. The man who wrote 1 John wrote this desperate short book calling on his brothers in Christ not to follow this tempting path. For the author, the love of God and the love of neighbor are equal and interchangeable. The Christian loves God by loving others in Christ. The author speaks of the faithful as Little Children, ones begotten by God. The children the author wants his readers to love are their own brothers and sisters in Christ. The message of 1

John is that we are all siblings, and as siblings we have responsibility to and for each other. God, the perfect parent, loves each of us, and for us to love God we should love our brothers and sisters in Christ. The parent we love is God our father—to love God we love our fellow Children of God.

Friends of Christ, we don't grasp this if we don't let our minds be engaged by the arts, the humanities, and the sciences. We don't grasp this without using the gifts God has given us. Certainly God redeems everyone and everything with a reckless sacred love. Not everyone has a head for math—I don't; not everyone has a head for literature. The basic message of 1 John—love one another, for God is love—is easy enough and true for all of us; most of us need more than that. We have too many questions. Most of us can use more than that. We can be better disciples by knowing more.

I don't know enough about Leonard Euler to do him justice, but I do know a little about Nicolaus Copernicus. He was incredibly gifted, a student of the Latin and Greek classics, astronomy, philosophy, and everything else. He trained his eyes on the heavens and his mind went to work, and he could not help thinking about what he saw. The movements of the planets made no sense if they were supposed to be centered on the Earth. They did make sense if

they were revolving around the Sun. Copernicus knew this might upset some people. He wrote, “Perhaps there will be babblers who, although completely ignorant of mathematics, nevertheless take it upon themselves to pass judgement on mathematical questions and, badly distorting some passages of Scripture to their purpose, will dare find fault with my undertaking and censure it. I disregard them even to the extent as despising their criticism as unfounded.”

The Church did just what Copernicus feared, and condemned his writings. Today, we know that the sun is not the center of the universe, as Copernicus theorized, but that the planets do indeed revolve around it. The earth is not the center of the universe. We are not the center of the universe. God’s creation is huge, far greater than anything the writers of scripture imagined. Science might have killed an old belief, but it opened up a profound new understanding. God was not rejected. God’s accomplishments were better appreciated. We are not the center of the universe, yet God knows every fiber of our being. God is so great that God knows everything there is to know about everything in this vast, seemingly infinite universe. Is the kingdom of God served by forbidding such knowledge? Hardly.

We are better able to serve God when we can see God at work in the world around us. Sometimes we need the simple reminder; sometimes, we need something bigger, something more complex. We need creativity. We need insight. We need innovation. We need the gifts that God gave us, not for their own sake, but for the sake of God's work in the world. Copernicus and Euler and countless others like them have opened our minds to a greater comprehension of the world around us, and, for us Christians, hopefully have opened our minds to a greater humility. So today we remember Nicolaus and Leonard, two of God's Little Children, and we thank God for the lives of these saints, and the ways in which they have enabled us to do God's work. Amen