

Science, Sharks and the Mystery of Faith

By Fr. Glenn McDonald, CSB

High school students often ask me how to reconcile the truth of science with the truth of faith. In an attempt to answer their question, I stumbled upon reading about neuroscience and the development of the human brain. It has been a fascinating topic to learn about, and to my great surprise resulted in an unexpected convergence with the concept of mystery in Catholic spirituality.

For example, one scientist highlighted the unique experience of the human brain by contrasting it against the neurology of another creature, namely, a shark! Did you know that a shark can hear its prey from more than a kilometer away, smell it from over one hundred meters away, and even taste its prey from a distance, because sharks have taste receptors on the surface of their body?

I take away two lessons from the neurology of sharks. Firstly, I am never swimming in the ocean again! Secondly, I see the world around me, but I am only perceiving part of it — the part that the human brain has evolved to see.

Science reveals that there is a world beyond human senses. Ironically, it is my life of prayer and faith that opens me up to accepting this scientific truth. Catholic spirituality draws upon the idea of mystery to acknowledge that the full truth of God is beyond what human senses can perceive or the human mind can fully understand. However, Jesus has taught us that God is love, and that, whenever we give our lives as a gift of love to others, God's love is present, even if God's presence cannot be seen.