
The first images from the James Webb Space Telescope.

Consolmagno (Vatican Observatory): “The universe is not only logical, it is also beautiful”

“I’m really excited by the new images from the Webb telescope! The images are gorgeous, as anyone can see for themselves. It’s a tantalizing glimpse of what we’ll be able to learn about the universe with this telescope in the future.” Jesuit Father **Guy Consolmagno**, Director of the Vatican Observatory, expressed his enthusiasm at the first deep space images taken by James Webb Space Telescope, the largest and most powerful space telescope ever built. “Such images are a necessary food for the human spirit—we do not live by bread alone — especially in these times.”



Do you relish this achievement also on a personal level? There is also a personal side to how delighted I am with this success. Astronomy is a small field, we astronomers all tend to know one another. Many of the scientists who built the instruments and planned the observations are personal friends of mine. I know how long and how hard they and their colleagues have worked to make this incredible machine work. It is a tribute to the power of the human spirit, what we can do when we work together. **The images are gorgeous in scientific terms, but they also testify to the captivating beauty of the universe...** The science behind this telescope is our attempt to use our God-given intelligence to understand the logic of the universe.

The universe wouldn’t work if it weren’t logical.

But as these images show, the universe is not only logical, it is also beautiful. This is God’s creation being revealed to us, and in it we can see both His astonishing power and His love of beauty.



Science as a human achievement or gift from God? I am amazed and grateful that God has given us humans, His creation, the ability to see and understand what He has done. “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8) **Is this scientific and technological breakthrough equally meaningful for the Society of Jesus and its long-established work in the field of astronomy?** I was especially delighted to see Webb’s first spectrum of water vapour in the atmosphere of an exo-planet. It was about 150 years ago when Father Angelo Secchi SJ put a prism in front of his telescope lens on the roof of the St. Ignatius Church in Rome, and made the first spectral measurements of the atmospheres of the planets in our own solar system. I can only imagine how delighted he would be to see the science he pioneered applied to planets unknown to him orbiting distant stars.

Riccardo Benotti