

## Homily for Trinity Sunday

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.”

**What did we just do? We just traced the sign of the cross over our bodies and announced perhaps the most startling truth of our religion: our God is Triune, three persons in one God. But what does that mean? It’s a mystery! It’s like asking what was God doing before He created the cosmos? And the answer, of course, is that He was creating Hell for people who ask to have mysteries explained! But since the worst I can frighten you with is Heck, I’m going to have to do a little better.**

**First off, there’s the problem of translation. In Greek, the language of the New Testament and of the Nicene Creed, the word for *person* is “hypostasis,” which has to do with making abstractions concrete; to say God (an abstract idea) exists as Father, Son, and Spirit (concrete terms) posed less trouble for the Greek mind than it does for our own. Similarly, in Latin, *person* is translated as “persona,” which means “a mask.” To say God wears three masks--that of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is a little easier on the mind than our modern metaphysical understanding of *person* as a completely separate, independent entity. When we hear God is three persons it is easy to fall into tritheism: after all, three is three, not one. We need to put our calculators away, however.**

**The question of God’s nature arose early in the Church’s history as it grappled with the following:**

Is Jesus God? Is he all of God? Is the Holy Spirit personal or an impersonal force or power? Is the Holy Spirit equal with the Father and the Son? These questions all relate to the drama of salvation and therefore they relate to what people believe about the gospel itself. The Christian gospel is that God came among

people in Jesus Christ—“Immanuel”—“God with us.” It also includes the unity of God: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” It also includes the presence of God within his people: the Spirit indwelling and empowering Christians. This basic account of the Trinitarian structure of salvation is the “stuff” of which the doctrine of the Trinity is made. (Olson, Roger E. & Christopher A. Hall. *The Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. Print.)

**So crucial to a proper understanding of what it means to be a Christian, the Church formulated a blueprint for its trinitarian understanding of God in the Nicene Creed, which we will recite in just a few moments in words essentially unchanged since the fourth century. But do have any idea what we’re saying or have the words simply become “what we do,” like saying the Pledge of Allegiance at Commencement addresses or answering “Yes, dear,” when our spouse speaks?**

There is a beauty in the concept of the Trinity itself that points toward the beauty of God himself. It is the beauty of love reflected in a truth: God is love. Whom did he love before there was a world? Himself—within the fellowship of three mutually loving persons. The Trinity thus becomes a model of creaturely love and fellowship. In the end, it is not an esoteric idea but a supremely practical doctrine for the guidance of Christian life and thought. (Olson & Hall 4)

**For evidence of this idea we need look no further than this morning’s gospel reading from St. John. “He that hath seen me,” says Christ “hath seen the Father; for I am in the Father, and the Father in Me. I and My Father are one.” This is as explicit a biblical statement of Christ’s divinity as one could desire. Those who say,**

“Jesus never claimed to be God!” haven’t read the Gospel of John very carefully. True, he doesn’t parade the statement around in a fit of narcissism: “Lookit me! I’m God! And you’re not!” But he does make it clear that those desiring to see God need look no further, and, most importantly, they do have to *act* on that observation: “...as the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you; and this is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.” This is where theologians arguing for a social understanding of the Trinity gain their strength: love demands an object. God cannot be love and be supremely alone, this line of thinking goes. To argue God is love is to imply that within God there must be loveable hypostases/personae/persons. The argument from the gospel is that the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father *intensely* and *eternally*. In his treatment of the Trinity, St. Augustine said that this dynamic of love between these two divine persons generates a third, the Holy Spirit, which spills out into the world in a love embrace, drawing all creation into the ever-widening circle.

Back to the gospel, Christ says, “When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, who proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me.” In other words, the Holy Spirit is the *witness* of Christ’s divinity, living and loving through *us*, the Mystical Body of Christ. “And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning.” Yes, he’s speaking here specifically of the twelve, but by extension he is speaking of every soul given the Holy Spirit in his or her baptism by virtue of the apostolic succession from those twelve men.

The love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is analogous to the love we’re supposed to have amongst ourselves, starting with our families, then moving outward beyond our tribe and nation, to all of creation, to God Himself. “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.” The Trinity is not some esoteric idea about God; the Trinity is an analogy of what it means to say, God is love. The Father loves the Son with an irresistible love so powerful that it unites the two in one: “I and my Father are one.” The Father loves

**the Son and all who are united to the Son in the bond of the Holy Spirit. And yet it is not three separate gods doing three separate things but one God acting out of love.**

**Does that make some sense to you? Are you a little more persuaded? If not, let me leave you with a common analogy that always pops up when someone tries to “explain the Trinity.” You’ve heard it before: water can exist in three forms—as liquid, as solid ice, and as steam--all the while remaining one substance, water. So far so good. God can exist in three forms—as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit--all the while remaining one being, God. In its three qualities water acts differently yet remains water: quenching and dissolving as liquid; cooling and preserving as ice; heating and cleansing as steam. In His Three Persons God acts differently yet remains God: creating and begetting as the Father; revealing and teaching as the Son; healing and sustaining as the Holy Spirit. We cannot live without water. We cannot live without God.**

“And now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, Three Persons in one God, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all honour, might, majesty, power and dominion, now, henceforth and for evermore. Amen.”

Trinity Sunday

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