

## **Homily For the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity - Year A**

### **St Peter's 8:00/9:30/11:30/5:00 Masses - June 4, 2023**

**Exodus 34:4-9** "Although this is a stiff necked people, pardon our iniquity and sin, & take us for your inheritance."

**Psalm 3:52-56** "Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our fathers, and blessed is your glorious and holy name."

**2 Corinthians 13:11-13** "The grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and communion of the Holy Spirit be with you."

**John 3:16-18** "God did not send the Son to condemn the world but so that the world might be saved through him."

### **Holy Trinity: Who Can Understand It?**

#### **Introduction**

Why Three persons? I'll let you in on a little secret. I don't know.

The threes are everywhere as a higher plane.

What do we really need to know? Let the theologians write precise words.

One of the ideas that came about as a result of the scientific revolution of recent centuries was that, if we studied the natural world long enough, in the right way, using modern techniques and technology, that we would eventually understand the whole universe. This allowed us, as a culture, to be less dependent on God and more on our own human capabilities. After all, if we understand everything and use it to our advantage, we can solve poverty and war. We can have everything we need or want. What do we need God for? Well, how did that work out for us? There are some successes but, in general, not so well. And, as scientific study becomes more sophisticated, we realize that there is more yet to discover than we imagined. So, even the natural world appears to have infinite secrets that remain a mystery to us.

This should tell us something about the God who made everything. It tells us that God is pretty much a mystery that we can learn something about on our own, but we are always going to fall short of the fullness of that mystery unless - one thing - God chooses to reveal himself to us. That one thing is at the heart of God's plan. The history of our faith IS one and the same with God's plan from the beginning to reveal himself to us. We didn't make up that story. That's God's story which he

has given us the privilege to participate in. It's God's story and God's plan, but we sure get to decide whether we want to learn about it, learn from it, to mature in it, to grow in joy through it.

My Grandmother was a great storyteller. One of the things she did was to include some colourful expressions from her Croatian heritage. For example, she would say: I always make people happy. If they are not happy when I come to visit them, they will be happy when I leave. Either way, they will be happy.

Preaching a homily is like that. If they aren't happy while I am preaching, they will be very happy when I stop. Today that might be especially true. But God always makes it possible for us to be happy without limit. That is his nature. If we are not happy in the presence of God, then it's probably on us. We are missing something.

Possibly that something that is missing for you might have to do with the way God has revealed himself as a Holy Trinity, three distinct persons with one divine nature. This Sunday is sometimes called the preacher's worst nightmare. How to explain something that is unexplainable.

I have been in Catholic school classrooms, from Kindergarten to Grade 9, hundreds of times, to chat about our faith, answer questions and offer teachings to build on whatever the students are learning in their religion classes. Even when the Trinity comes up, I have never been asked: Say, Deacon, could you go over that thing one more time where you say that God is three persons but with only one nature? That's not the math that Mrs. Smith is teaching us. I'm still waiting for the Grade One girl or boy to raise their hand to say: I have been thinking about what you said that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are consubstantial, of one substance. They don't ask that, but from Kindergarten to Grade 9 someone always asks, "Yeah, but who made God?"

We invoke the Trinity every time we make the sign of the cross. Baseball players frequently make that sign when they go up to bat. It looks like they are swatting flies but it's the sign of the thing we are talking about today.

Three is everywhere in the life of faith. The Bible tells us about the life of Jesus, the time before him, and the time after him (the time of the Church). Much of the Old Testament is built around the three promises God made to Abraham: There would be a people, a land (the promised land), and there would be a blessing for the whole world, which was to be Jesus the Messiah. Then there is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus himself. Jesus refers to himself as "the way, the truth and the life." Near the end of his life, Jesus tells them that if they tear down the temple, he will rebuild it in three days. Of course he is talking about himself as the new temple of God which will spend three days in the tomb from his death to his resurrection. Even from the time of the ancient philosophers, they talked about the ways humans experience the divine: through goodness, truth and beauty. Finally, Jesus reveals to us the fullness of God. He is the Son, who prays to the Father, then sends the Holy Spirit. At the Last Supper before his death, Jesus wants them to know three things: He will be killed, the Father will raise him to life, and he will not abandon them because he will send the Spirit. This Spirit will not be an inferior product. It will teach them everything and breathe life into them so they will proclaim the Good News. Jesus is the Son, who prays to the Father, then sends the Holy Spirit.

## **Exodus**

Now if we look at even the natural world, we can see in the book of Exodus that this threefold knowledge about God was being prepared from a long time before Jesus. The people lived in two dimensions essentially. They travelled East/West or North/South. But God was in the third dimension. The mountains. The mountain was the place of encounter with God. The people were not yet ready to see the fullness of God, face to face as it were. Only Moses went up the mountain to meet God. And God came down to meet him there in a cloud.

Moses is bringing two new tablets because he broke the first ones in anger when he saw them worshipping an image they had made themselves, a golden calf. We are meant to notice the biblical symbol of the cloud. A cloud obscures vision. There is a sense that, in this life, God is not seen clearly. He is the source of our existence but he is beyond the human capacities of our senses. We have to, in a

sense, stop seeing with our eyes so we can see the heart of who God is. One reason we use incense at mass is because of that. It clouds our vision, and sometimes our sinuses. In the Byzantine liturgy, they will say that, if you can still see the altar, there is not enough incense.

If you think you understand God fully, then it's not God. In the encounter on the mountain, God gives his name to Moses as 'Lord'. The name God gave to Moses at their first meeting, at the burning bush, was essentially unpronounceable. They were not to say it as if they could possess or control God. So they were to call him simply 'Adonai', or 'Lord'.

But then Jesus comes and affirms that God does want to be known. All those references to him from before are now made visible and tangible and relateable in Jesus. He is merciful because he loves even the sinner. He is gracious because he is the giver of gifts. He is kind because he loves those who are poor or downtrodden. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love because he is patient with us. He is faithful because our relationship with him depends not on our tendency to infidelity but on his commitment to us as his creatures whom he has made to share in his own blessed life. Most religions say that God loves. Only Christianity says that God IS love.

## **John**

John Chapter 3, verse 16, Jesus has been talking with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, who were known for their knowledge of God. Nicodemus perceives dimly, like through a cloud, that Jesus is from God because of the things he does, the signs he performs. Then Jesus hits him with the heart of the Christian faith: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." There it is. There is what we need to know. No one gauged the depth of divine love until Jesus laid down his life and God raised him up, opening the way to eternal life for all who believe in him.

## **The Holy Trinity**

When we look into a mirror, we see an image of ourselves. It tells us a lot, but it is very limited. When we look at the Son, we see a perfect image of the Father. They are one in being. They have one nature, and yet they are two separate persons,, each seeing the utter perfection of the other. They are a community of the love that is God. The Father loves the Son from all eternity. The Son returns that love from all eternity. We see images of God the Father as an old man with a large beard. We see images of the Son as a younger man with a smaller beard. But they are not older and younger. They are the one God who has existed from before time itself. The Father speaks creation through his word, which is the Son.

What about the Holy Spirit. The love between the Father and the Son is so real, that it is a distinct person, which shares fully in the divine nature. We get a glimpse of this even in that human relationship called marriage. A husband and wife share a love so intense that a new life, a child, comes out of that love. God made this relationship to be an image of the Holy Trinity. That is why it is so problematic when new life is artificially blocked, or intentionally destroyed. God's own image, built into human beings from the time of creation, is lost.

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity tells us that we do not have a solitary God up there in heaven, far away. No, he is the Father who gave us his Son, who became one like us but reflects the perfect love of the Father, and who sends his own Spirit to be even closer to us.

## **Call To Conversion**

We believe that God wants all of us to become a reflected image of the Father, in the Son, by the Holy Spirit. Christianity is not a self help philosophy, where we pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and make something of ourselves in the world. In that model, some people will become a success story. To know the triune God is to know this relationship of love. Our formal incorporation into this divine relationship is through baptism. Our participation in that mystery is the very heart of our lives of faith.

Let us reflect on how we relate to this God in our prayer life. When I feel God's power and want to give thanks. When I see the beauty of creation, when I am astounded by being itself, I am talking with the Father. When I need forgiveness. When I am tempted to sin. When I need to know that God understands me, I turn to Jesus. When I am tired. when I need confidence, energy and wisdom, I turn to the Holy Spirit. We ask the Holy Spirit, who is one with the Father and the Son, to come into our darkest moments, into our doubts, into our resistance to love, come. Into our brokenness, into the hells that we create and those imposed on us.

We ask the triune God, who is love, to make us single hearted, not divided, to soften our hearts so that we become one with love itself. It's a mystery, alright, but it is a mystery meant for you and I here today.

#### **Key Verses Today**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *Blest be God the Father, and the only begotten Son of God, and also the Holy Spirit, for he has shown us his merciful love.*

**Collect:** *God our Father, who sent the Word of truth and the Spirit of sanctification, grant that we may acknowledge the Trinity of eternal glory and adore your unity, powerful in majesty.*

**Exodus:** *Moses went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, taking the two tablets of stone. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him and proclaimed the name, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Moses bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped. He said, "If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."*

**Psalms:** *Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our fathers, and blessed is your glorious and holy name. Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory. Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, to be highly exalted forever. Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven, to be sung and glorified forever.*

**2 Corinthians:** *Brothers and sisters, put things in order. Listen to my appeal. Agree with one another. Live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.*

**John:** *Jesus said to Nicodemus: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. The one who believes in him is not condemned. But the one who does not believe is condemned already, for not having believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."*