

Trinity Sunday (A)
June 19, 2011

Throughout my priestly life, I've wondered about the Trinity. Does it say anything about our daily life? It may well be true, but does it touch our human or Christian existence? Over the years, my own thinking has become exactly the opposite: the Trinity is highly important for our day-to-day living. Without the Trinity, Christian life would make little sense. The Trinity tells us something remarkable about who we are and what we ought to be. Let me suggest how.

First, the view from the Church. The Church's dogma of the Trinity states simply and profoundly: there is but one God. In this one God there are three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three Persons are really distinct: the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. Each of these Persons is really and truly God. And still there is but one God.

We could never have figured that out if God had not told us. And even after that, we cannot explain how God is One and Three. One way of giving meaning to the mystery is to steal St. John's definition of God: "God is Love." We find the perfect realization of love in the Trinity. You see, love between persons makes a double demand. Lover and beloved must remain two, yet the two must somehow be one. (I'm dealing with this, preparing couples for marriage right now). Love demands distinct persons. Love is we: a you and an I. Whether I love God or another human being, I never stop being myself. Love demands me and you.

But love forbids "mine" and "yours" – what Augustine calls "those ice-cold words." The two, remaining two, must somehow be one. We've long since learned a bitter-sweet lesson: oneness with someone beloved can be achieved only in terms of self-giving. To love is to give – to give one's self. To love perfectly is to give until there is nothing left to give. Only then do the two, remaining two, become perfectly one.

The Trinity is the total realization of perfect love. God's secret is this: there is "I and you" without "yours and mine." There are three Persons. What makes God God – the Father has it completely, the Son has it completely, the Spirit has it completely. No one has anything the other does not have. The love with which the Son loves the Father is the selfsame love with which the Father loves the Son.

And this love of Father and Son *is* the Holy Spirit. God is an eternal exchange of love.

Whew! Let's look at the Bible. Scripture has an advantage over dogma: it tells a story. And the story Scripture tells is not God's secret life but God as God breaks into our history and links God's life with our own. It tells of a God who parented children from the dust of the earth, God's own image and likeness. A God who never abandoned God's children through all their infidelities, who assured them when they felt forsaken and forgotten: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." A Father who "so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Scripture tells of Jesus, equal to the Father, a Son who did not stand on His dignity but emptied Himself of His glory, took on the status of a slave, became like us, and humbled Himself with an obedience that climaxed in crucifixion. A Son who left us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink. A Son who promised that, if we love Him, His Father will love us and they will make their home in us.

Scripture tells of a Holy Spirit, dwelling within us. A Spirit that baptizes us into one body, inspires us with different gifts for the benefit of all. A Spirit whose "fruit... is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Read Scripture with eyes of faith and the Trinity will no longer be a toy for theologians but a joy for believers. Today is *our* feast. Today we remember gratefully what makes for Christian living. We share in the rhythm of God's own life. Brothers and sisters of Christ, we are daughters and sons of the Father, precisely because the very Spirit that is Christ's own is now given to us. And so today we celebrate the Eucharist with renewed understanding: inspired by the Spirit, we offer Christ (and ourselves) to the Father, cry aloud in thanksgiving: "Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, forever and ever!" Amen? Amen!

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