

TRINITY SUNDAY – B (June 7, 2009)  
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The month of June is now upon us, a month traditionally associated with weddings. And the wedding season kicks into high gear here at St. Edward, starting this coming weekend. One of the things I enjoy visiting with engaged couples about is how they met, started dating, and how they gradually came to know that they truly wanted to spend the rest of their lives together in marriage. The more they came to know each other, the more they realized there was even more to learn and the more they realized what love is really all about.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Most Holy Trinity on this first Sunday after the Easter season. We celebrate the reality and the truth that God is three and one at one and the same time. And like that engaged or married couple who continually learn and love more and more about each other, this feast helps us realize that we are called to always grow in our knowledge and love of this triune God—we will never fully comprehend this God. Who would dare claim a full understanding of God being three and one at the same time? We are talking mystery here in the theological sense of the word: something we believe because God reveals it (and God, who is truth itself, cannot lie), but we cannot fully comprehend in the way we can understand, e.g., that  $2 + 2 = 4$ .

Our scripture readings provide a critical part of that divine revelation. In the first reading (Deuteronomy), Moses, who spoke directly with God, affirms the fundamental truth that God is one. “This is why you must now know, and fix in your heart, that the Lord is God...and that there is no other.” As Christians, we join the Jews and Moslems in the firm belief that there is only one God. Christianity, Judaism and Islam are the three great monotheistic religions in the world: ‘mono-‘ is a prefix meaning ‘one’, and ‘theistic’ comes from the Greek word meaning ‘God’—thus, ‘one God’.

But the gospel reminds us that there is more to the truth of this one God. Matthew tells us that before Jesus ascended into heaven, he gave the apostles some important work to do, including the work of baptizing those who would follow Jesus. And they were to do so in a specific way: in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This God who is one is also three in a mysterious, inexplicable way—in his oneness, God also exists as those three Divine Persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is God, the Son (Jesus) is God, and the Holy Spirit is God...but there are not three gods—only one. ‘Mystery’, to say the least. And God as Trinity is the fundamental difference between Christianity on one hand and Judaism and Islam on the other. Jews and Moslems may acknowledge Jesus as teacher and perhaps even as prophet, but they do not acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, co-eternal with the Father.

The Church’s understanding of God as three in one began in very basic form with the teaching of the apostles and the beginning of their work of orally preaching the gospel of Jesus. That preaching eventually was preserved in written form to a major extent. The gospels, the letters of Paul and other sacred writings, together with the ongoing teaching of the Christian message guided by the Holy Spirit, helped the Church through those first few centuries to explain with growing clarity this truth about God. Church councils in the fourth and fifth centuries made more explicit our belief in the Holy Trinity; the Nicene Creed that we profess every Sunday comes in large part from the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. And so as time goes on, we as individuals and as Church continue to grow in our knowledge and understanding of this God of ours.

But the Trinity is far more than a collection of words, more than an abstract or philosophical statement of academic interest alone. The truth of God as Trinity is crucial because it is all about the ultimate reason we exist—to love and serve God in this life and live forever in perfect joy with and in him in heaven. In his first letter, St. John reminds us that God is love; his very nature and essence is love. And that was

true before the human race or anything else was even created. In order for God to be love, there has to be more to God than oneness alone—of its nature, love is a gift of self to another. It has been said that ‘it is God’s nature...to be love, because he is a Trinity of Persons who pour forth their love to one another.’ It has also been put this way: the Father is the One who loves, the Son is the One who is loved, and the Holy Spirit is the love between them.

In other words, God is communal; there is relationship within God, and the Trinity is that relationship. And if we are made in God’s image and likeness (as the first chapter of Genesis affirms), then we are made for relationship as well—with God and with others as well. We are not meant to exist only as Lone Rangers. And that is incredibly good news! God, who eternally exists in the relationship of love as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has made us to be in that same kind of relationship of love. To use today’s hi-tech lingo, we are ‘hard-wired’ to love, to be in communion with others and especially with God. And as that relationship is lived on the human level most intimately in the family, we are also invited to be part of the eternal family of God. Listen again to those amazing words of St. Paul from our second reading: “...you received a Spirit of adoption through whom we cry ‘Abba, Father!’...we are children of God, and...heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.’ Father...children...adoption: that’s family, all right; that is the language of relationship and of love, and Jesus, God the Son, has made it possible to be in that family of God forever.

Think of those most intense experiences of love that you have had: the promises and expressions of love between bride and groom on their wedding day; the look of awe and the joyful, tearful embrace of a newborn child by his or her parents, the hug you give to or receive from your best friend on the sharing of good news, the farewell words and tears offered to a loved one who is dying. You cannot fully describe or capture those experiences with mere words, can you? But they are real and true—intensely and definitively so, and they point us to a reality that exists beyond ourselves and beyond this world. You may remember that book about Mother Teresa I talked about earlier this year (“Mother Teresa’s Secret Fire”). The author wrote about this: “The...spontaneous drive to embrace those we love points to the full merging and eternal union with the Godhead for which we were created, and which is symbolized in every human embrace.”

Precisely because God is love, a love that originates in the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are made in the image of love—we are made to love. And the most profound love that we experience in our human relationships (husband/wife, parent/child, and all the others) is but the faintest image, the barest reflection of the love God has and desires for us and in which he calls us to rejoice forever. No wonder the Trinity is the centerpiece and foundation of the Christian faith! All praise, thanksgiving, glory and honor to the one and only God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—now and forever. Amen!