

Trinity Sunday: A Stewardship Conference

Sheraton Hotel, Richmond

11 June 2017

Dear brother priests, and dear friends in Christ:

Introduction

Today throughout the world the Church is celebrating the great Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. Having completed our remembrance of the great mysteries celebrating the saving events of our faith – how God has entered our history through his birth, celebrated during the Christmas season, and how the passion, death and resurrection of Christ and the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost have saved us – the Church now invites us pause in wonder to ponder the great mystery of the Triune God who has revealed himself as the centre of the universe and of history. And it is an almost blinding mystery, that of our “God of glory and majesty.”¹

Precisely because it is so lofty, the mystery of God himself reminds us not to reduce his greatness, his fascination within our limited horizons.

1. A Profound Mystery

¹ Eucharistic Prayer I.

Today's feast places before us the central mystery of our Catholic faith: that God is one in his divinity but three in his persons. This is not some "added extra" to who God is. The Trinity is not some kind of "mathematics of the Deity" or puzzle. Without at least some grasp of the mystery of the Trinity we fall short, very short, of understanding *who* God really is.² In fact, "God in his greatness cannot be anything but a mystery for us, yet he revealed himself. We can know him in his Son and thus also know the Father and the Holy Spirit."³

Recently at Confirmation at a local parish when I asked the boys and girls "how many gods are there?" They all answered correctly, "one." And then to the question, "how many persons?" they answered "three." Off on the right track. Then I asked how many understood this. Most – a little to my surprise – hands shot up. "Lucky them," I thought. But instead I said that "this is a great mystery, who God is, and if we could understand him completely, then we would be God ourselves. I probably should have said something about revelation, but moved on quickly to some question about the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

But thanks to the Holy Spirit, who guides us to the whole truth of divine revelation (cf. Jn 16:13) believers can know, at least in a limited

² Cf. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Homily given in the Cathedral of Bayeux on the Feast of the Holy Trinity (6 June 2004).

³ Benedict XVI, Homily (19 June 2011).

way, something about the inner life of God himself. There is one God in three persons. He is the Creator and merciful Father; he is the Only-Begotten Son, who died and rose for us; he is the Holy Spirit through whom “God’s love has been poured into our hearts” (Rom 5:5). We must admit that without Revelation, we would not know this. The mystery is simply too great, too unfathomable for us to grasp had it not been revealed.

God in Three Persons

There are some today who would not be upset if we dropped the Trinity from our belief. For one thing, they would say, it would help dialogue with the Jews and Muslims, who profess faith in a God who is strictly one.

Scripture tells us otherwise. His Name – “Love” – clearly expresses that “the God of the Bible is not some kind of monad closed in on itself and satisfied with his own self-sufficiency but he is life that wants to communicate itself, openness, relationship. Words like ‘merciful,’ ‘abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ speak to us of a relationship, in particular, of a vital Being who offers himself, who wants to fill every gap, every shortage, who wants to give and to forgive, who desires to establish a solid and lasting bond.”⁴

Christians believe that God is triune because they believe in the

⁴ Benedict XVI, Homily (18 May 2008).

revelation that God is love! If God is love, then he must love someone. There is no such thing as love of nothing, a love that is not directed at anyone. So we ask: Who is it that God loves so that he is defined as love?

A first answer might be that God loves us! But men and women have only existed for a few million years. Who did God love before that? God could not have begun to love at a certain point in time because God cannot change.

Another answer might be that before he loved us, he loved the cosmos, the universe. But the universe has only existed for a few billion years. Who did God love before that so that he can be defined as love? We cannot say that God loved himself because self-love is not love, but egoism, or, as the psychologists say, narcissism.

How does Christian revelation answer this question? God is love in himself, before time, because there is eternally in him a Son, the Word, whom he loves from an infinite love which is the Holy Spirit.

Communion as Foundation of Everything: Living in Peace

In today's second reading from St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians the Apostle admonishes us: "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" (2 Cor 13:11). Every community is called to be a place of welcome for all. A primary mark of

the early Christian community was its acceptance and welcome of the stranger. God has welcomed us with open arms. As Christ's body, we should welcome everyone into our communities. Being open and welcoming to everyone is in fact welcoming Christ: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25.35).

Moreover, the Reading also teaches us that each person has a gift to offer the community: to participate and share in building it up. No one has a monopoly. The Lord needs every part of his Body to work together if, as St. Paul says, we are to "live in peace." As we have seen in recent days in the world, the forces of division and disruption can cause havoc. In a lesser way, just as division within a family is cause for heartbreak and demands that we seek reconciliation, that we be forgiving and merciful, so it is in our communities. Cooperation and harmony are the signs that we are living as the Lord wants – not insisting on our own way.

The mystery of the Trinity tells us that rooted in our very nature is to be "for" others and not just for ourselves. This is the foundation of self-giving, a self-giving unto death, that underlies the whole life of Christ and the meaning of Christian discipleship.

Our being created in the image and likeness of God-Communion calls us to understand ourselves as beings-in-relationship and to live interpersonal relations in solidarity and mutual love. Such relationships

play out, above all, in the sphere of our ecclesial communities, so that the image of the Church as icon of the Trinity is ever clearer. The Feast of the Most Holy Trinity invites us to commit ourselves in daily events to being leaven of communion.⁵

We are called to live not as one without the others, above or against the others, but one with the others.

3. “That the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:16)

When we look at today’s well-known Gospel, we can say that it completes the revelation made to Moses which we heard in the First Reading. There the Lord does not allow Moses to see his face but revealed that, even in face of sin, he is full of goodness: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6).

This is the revelation of the Face of God. This self-definition of God expresses his merciful love: a love that triumphs over the sin of the people, eliminating it. We can always be sure of this goodness which does not abandon us. There can be no clearer revelation. We have a God who refuses to destroy sinners and wants to show his love in an even more profound and surprising way to sinners themselves, in order to always offer them the possibility of conversion and forgiveness.

The Gospel indicates the point to which God has shown his mercy.

⁵ Cf. Francis, Angelus (22 May 2016).

John the Evangelist refers to these words of Jesus: “For 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” (Jn 3:16).

In the world there is evil, selfishness and wickedness. God could come to judge this world, to destroy evil, to punish those who work in darkness. Instead, he shows his love for the world and for men and women, despite their sin, and sends what is most precious to him: his Only-Begotten Son.

Not only does God send him, but he gives him as a gift to the world. Jesus is the Son of God who was born for us, who lived for us, who healed the sick, forgave sins and welcomed everyone. Responding to the love that comes from the Father, the Son gave his own life for us. On the cross God’s merciful love reaches its highest expression. And it is on the cross that the Son of God obtains for us a share in eternal life that is communicated to us with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the mystery of the cross, the three divine Persons are present: the Father, who gives his Only-Begotten Son for the salvation of the world; the Son, who totally fulfils the Father’s plan; the Holy Spirit — poured out by Jesus at the moment of his death — who comes to make us participants in divine life, to transform our existence so that it may be enlivened by divine love.⁶

⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (19 June 2011).

Conclusion

We turn now to the Table of the Eucharist, confident that, in his mercy, the Father, through the working of the Holy Spirit, will transform our simple gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of his Son, so that we may deepen our communion with the Triune God for our salvation and that of the world.

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