

Trinity Sunday: C

St. Monica's, CWL Convention

29 May 2010

Dear Father Boniface, Father Tran and Father D'Souza; dear Sisters, members attending the CWL Provincial Convention 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 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 to within our limited horizons. Here, after celebrating his marvellous deeds in the liturgical seasons of Advent and then Lent, believers raise their “eyes to the blinding mystery of light whence all these shafts of radiance come. Nothing in creation or Christianity can be understood apart from this

¹ Eucharistic Prayer I.

mystery, the mystery of the divine Trinity, which is always presupposed; now, however, it is made the object of explicit reflection, praise and worship.”²

This most central mystery of our faith is not an “added extra” that has no meaning. The Trinity is not some kind of “mathematics of the Deity” or just a mystery-puzzle that we shall one day understand with the help of the light of glory. Without at least some grasp of the mystery of the Trinity we fall short, very short, of understanding *who* God really is.³

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 14.

³ Cf. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Homily given in the Cathedral of Bayeux on the Feast of the Holy Trinity (6 June 2004).

Thanks to the Holy Spirit, who guides us to the whole truth of divine revelation (cf. Jn 16:13), as we heard proclaimed in the Gospel, believers can know, at least in a limited way, something about the inner life of God himself. He has revealed to us that God is love, as we shall sing in the Preface, “not in the oneness of a single Person, but in the Trinity of one substance.”⁴ Wow! What does that mean? Perhaps another formulation is more familiar: that 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). Three distinct Persons who are one God because the Father is love, the Son is love, the Spirit is love.⁵ We must confess that without Revelation, we would not know this; we could not believe it. The mystery is simply too great, too unfathomable for us to grasp had it not been revealed.

Communion of Persons

Our faith teaches us – a faith that comes to us from the Apostles who received this Revelation from Christ – that God is not infinite solitude but a communion of love and life. God has revealed himself as

⁴ Preface of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (7 June 2009).

infinite Love.⁶ St. John sums up this great revelation: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8,16), he simply says, and “we have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us” (cf. 1 Jn 4:16). Moreover, “God does not love us in a manner different from the way he loves in himself.”⁷ The love that flows between the divine Persons is the same love with which God loves us!

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.

The answer is that Christians believe that God is triune because they believe in the 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.

⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Angelus* (11 June 2006).

⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Light of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 312.

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.

In every love there are always three realities or subjects: one who loves, one who is loved and the love that unites them. Where God is understood as absolute power, there is no need for there to be more than one person, for power can be exercised quite well by one person. But if God is understood as absolute love, then it cannot be this way.⁸

Importance of the Trinity for Us as Images of God

We human persons, created in the image of the Triune God (cf. Gen 1:26-27), are called to live in love. To be loved and to love is our noblest calling.⁹ Since God is triune, we have the window that tells us that in the depths of ultimate reality, love is “love of another.” God is both love in himself and love because he loves us.

⁸ Raniero Cantalamessa, Homily, “Trinity is a School of Relations” (18 May 2008).

⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (22 May 2005).

We are not fulfilled in absolute autonomy or independence, living for ourselves alone. On the contrary, we are fulfilled by recognizing ourselves as God's children, as creatures with our hands reaching up to God and out to our brothers and sisters.

In fact, we know that happiness and unhappiness on earth depend in large part upon the quality of our relationships. The Trinity reveals the secret to good relationships. Love, in its different forms, is what makes relationships beautiful, free and gratifying. Here we see how important it is that God be seen primarily as love and not as power: love gives, power dominates.

That which poisons a relationship is the will to dominate another person, to possess or use that person instead of welcoming and giving ourselves to him or her.

But, since God is a being in relation and we are made in his image and likeness, then we must reflect who he is and how he loves.

Think how we have taken to glorifying the "lone" hero, the uncommitted man or woman – and now the ultimate in solo performance: the ability for a woman to have a child without sexual relations! Each of us is not a "person in his or her own right" so to speak – as we are before the law – but a person necessarily in relation to others.

Within the Triune God there is not "independence," but

communion: one existing for the other. Were there independence, there would be three gods!

The very names we give to the divine persons are relational: Father and Son. You can't be Father without being Son! This is why our naming of God can never be replaced by titles such as Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier!

Conclusion

As we proceed now to the Liturgy of the Eucharist, note how the very structure of the Eucharistic Prayer betrays its profoundly trinitarian stamp:

(a) It is addressed to the **Father**, the Lord: "You are holy indeed." The Eucharist is Thanksgiving to the Father.

(b) Its fulfillment is the Great Memorial, the Passover, of the Saving Events accomplished by the **Son**: all comes "through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord"

(c) All is accomplished "**through the power of the Holy Spirit**": by his working: We ask the Father to make the gifts holy by the working of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit accomplishes the sanctification of the gifts and made into the Real Presence; he is the one who makes Christ present; in this sense he is "Giver of Life."

Let us praise and thank God for revealing himself to us and, at the

same time, for helping us understand who we are as persons who live in communion, the communion of our families, our parishes, our communities and society as a whole.

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