

## Holy Trinity – May 27, 2018

- One of the first things I learned as a Catholic was to bless myself: “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost”.
- Later I learned this blessing was a prayer itself, and not just a way to begin or end a prayer.
- It pleased me immensely, that something so simple could itself be a prayer.
- The other thing that fascinated me was the sign of the cross, the physical gesture that accompanies the blessing.
- Granted, it was a bit tricky as a 4 year old to figure out how to move my hands. Up, down, left, right. But like so many other things, it has become reflexive, a part of who I am.
- And it makes this prayer a very public act, showing others what we are doing and marking us as Catholics since few other Christian religions have this practice.
- Why is this prayer so primordial, so elemental? Why is it the beginning and the end of so many of our other prayers, including the Mass we are celebrating now?
- I suppose it’s because prayer is addressed to God, and if we imagine God as having three persons, we should acknowledge all of them.
- But what exactly is this business of three persons? How can a single being be three persons? Aren’t persons distinct beings?
- My mother told me this was a mystery; something to be believed, not understood. It was something else that made us distinctive as Catholics. We were not tied to the rationality of other faiths.
- But maybe we can understand it in some way.
- There are many ways to think about the Trinity. One is in terms of the history of our relationship with God. This history has three main parts:
  - The first is recorded in the Old Testament, the time before Christ came;
  - The second is the time of Christ on earth;
  - The third is after Christ left, the time we are still living in today.
- In each of these periods, one or other of the three persons is prominent: the Creator-Father in the first one, Jesus the Son in the second and the Spirit in the third one.
- Looked at in this way, the Trinity is about a developing relationship with God, and each person in the Trinity literally personifies our relationship with God.
- We can also think of this in terms of the relationships we have with each other, particularly those within our families.
- The relationship I had with my parents in later life was very different from the one I had when I was a child.
- There are good reasons for these relationships to change over time as we get older and mature. Our persons are the same, but how we relate to each other changes.
- In the first reading, we get a sense of this in terms of the relationship between God and the Israelites.

- Moses is proclaiming how God is no longer a remote deity, but instead talks to the people directly and takes the Israelites under his wing by rescuing them from bondage in Egypt.
- There is a real enthusiasm in Moses's words: "Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived?"
- Here God has personality in a literal sense: he talks to the Israelites.
- But of course, the relationship does not stop developing. This person promises to get even closer by sending a messiah, a son to live and die among us.
- So, the second person is the son of God. We don't usually think of a parent and their child as one being. But of course, parents and children share a lot of each other.
- I can't tell you how many times people have told me I have my father's eyes. It gets a little spooky sometimes because it also reminds me of the many other ways I am like him. And like my mother too. I know I am my own person, but in some sense I am them too.
- And so maybe Jesus as the second person of God makes sense in this way as well.
- This family connection is front and centre in the second reading where Paul speaks of the members of the early Christian community as "brothers and sisters: all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God."
- He goes on to say, "When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is the very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God..."
- Children of God. Sharing in the personhood of God.
- And finally, we have yet another person, the one we perhaps find most difficult to visualize. In iconography the Holy Spirit is most often represented as a bird, fluttering overhead. What does this say about our relationship with God?
- Our relationship has matured. It is still with the same God, but we have grown up. It has moved beyond the physical to another plane. God is no longer sustaining us by rescuing us physically from slavery or teaching us how to live our lives.
- Rather, God is here as the Advocate Fr Richard spoke of last week, to help us spiritually, to fly on our own and figure things out for ourselves in a world where what counts most is what is in our hearts and heads.
- The Holy Spirit is the person of God who outlives the here and now. At the end of the Gospel reading Jesus says, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- How else, but in the Spirit?

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