

Trinity Sunday  
May 22, 2016  
Year C, RCL

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Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31  
Romans 5:1-5  
John 16:12-15

Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is a profound text, for it means that God the Holy Spirit will always be revealing more and more of God's truth to the Church. One of those is the idea of the Trinity. That there is a single God with three faces. This idea was arrived at by a long process of spiritual discernment and politics, both ecclesiastical and imperial. What emerged was a perception of divine truth that is at first glance self-contradictory and which explains the data of the huge variety of experience people have of the divine.

My father used to tell a story of his own youth when a number of neighborhood boys thought it would be a good idea to baptize a particular cat they knew. So they found a barrel with rain water in it and set about to perform this liturgy. Now it is not clear to me whether these boys were experimenting with being Baptists or whether they simply thought that baptism by full immersion would be more amusing. In any case, at the appropriate moment the one who was presiding grabbed the cat and stuffed him into the barrel of water yelling, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and into the hole he goes." I am sure that it was to avoid such confusion in the future that the Church decided that the language of the liturgy needed to be brought into conformity with current usage, and created the 1979 Prayer Book that allows "Holy Spirit" to be substituted for "Holy Ghost."

Be that as it may, we are defined by our Baptism in the name of the Trinity, or threefoldness, triplicity. Today is one of the few feasts of the Church that apparently celebrates a purely theological doctrine. Think of other doctrines and they are connected with stories. The incarnation is celebrated both at the Feast of the Annunciation with story of Gabriel coming to Mary, and at the feast of the Nativity, better known as Christmas, with that story that we know so well. Redemption is celebrated at Good Friday with the account of the Passion of our Lord. The Resurrection is recalled at Easter, with story of the women at the tomb. But the Trinity?! The closest we can come to a story is that of the three men or angels that visit Abraham before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. And that is not among the readings for this morning. So we are forced to be theological this morning.

Yet theology is the rational reflection on our faith as we experience and live it. It is our thinking about how we experience God. Theology is always an expression of experience. So it is not that the Doctrine of the Trinity has no story; rather, it has too many. For the doctrine of the Trinity is simply the way the Church has come to hold together all the different stories that we all have about how God has been in our lives, how God is for us.

Suppose you are taking a walk outside on one of these beautiful spring days that we have had recently, and you think, "How wonderful of God to make such a beautiful world!" That understanding of God is of the Creator, the Father, the Initiator. Or perhaps you hear on the news about newborn children being born already infected with AIDS or addicted to heroin, and you think, "How could God permit such atrocities?" Again you are thinking of the God of

Power, the God of heaven and earth, the almighty. Or you wonder how your use of Styrofoam cups is contributing to the ecological crisis of this planet, and you say, "Have mercy on me." Then you are thinking of God as Judge.

Now suppose you hear a word of Jesus: "Love one another." "Blessed are the Poor." "He who follows me and looks back is not worthy of the Kingdom of God." Then you are in the presence of God's self-expression in the Word. Or perhaps you read of Teresa of Calcutta and you think, "There is someone behaving as Christ." Then you are seeing the spirit of Christ in other Flesh. When you participate in a Sacrament, eating bread and wine, then you act out the notion of God's presence in physical reality. This is the second person of the Trinity.

Or perhaps you go into a great cathedral in the middle of the week and amid the bustle of a few caretakers arranging chairs or sweeping, you still feel the holiness of the place, the presence of the saints who have worshiped here and the echoes of those leaders who marked this place and history. Or maybe you are in a prayer group and in a moment of weakness blurt out your great fear or need, that you never wanted anyone to know about, and there is support, and prayer, and strength given to help you through. Or perhaps you are going along with your life and the face of the teenage prostitute in Manhattan grabs your heart and you say, "This must stop, it is wrong." and you try to find out the name of the local covenant house to find out what you can do. Or on Memorial Day you are brought near to tears as you think of those who gave their last full measure of the devotion to this country and the principles for which it stands. All of these are the Holy Spirit.

Take a moment now and think of a time recently that you experienced God. [Pause] I bet you can identify which person of the Trinity it was.

The point of the Trinity is not that God is three. Rather, the point is that the one God is so complex and rich and flexible that no one description will prove adequate. To believe only in the Creator outside of the universe fails to take account of our experience of the divine in our hearts. To believe only in the presence of God within each one of us fails to give honor to the God who enters history with salvation in the giving of the Law, and the phenomenon of Jesus of Nazareth who redeems us from our failure to observe it.

Today, instead of trying to explain what is in the end inexplicable—this is why we call it a mystery—I invite you to turn to Hymn 370. The choir will be singing as a communion anthem. The text is attributed to St. Patrick, the great fifth century saint who brought the Gospel to Ireland. It is called St. Patrick's Lorica or breastplate. It is a kind of spell of protection. It begins and ends with an invocation of the Trinity, making a kind of sandwich. Verses 2- 5 invokes a variety of different aspects of God's power. Verse Two summarizes the Incarnation and the work of Jesus. Verse Three speaks of the angels, prophets, apostles and martyrs. Verse Four describes the virtues of the created universe and the power of all the cosmos. Verse Five tells of the variety of ways that God's love and grace in manifested in our lives. Then there is a shift in the melody and key from G Minor to G major. And there is this almost a spell invoking Christ's presence in and around the Christian. Finally we return to the original melody and the hymn ends where it began with the Trinity.

The point is that God's love, power, and grace come to us always, in all places, in many, many ways. To speak of God as a Trinity may be confusing, but if anything it is an oversimplification of the deep and expansive reality of the divine mystery we dare to call God. As we pray for every newly baptized person (and cat) may we always live with "an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works." Amen.

