

+In the Name of the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen+

We have arrived at the day on the Christian Kalendar that has been described with a multitude of adjectives including the ‘preacher’s nightmare’. It is the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, and as my beloved friend of blessed memory, Fr. Sam Steere once commented, “it is the one day of the year in which more heresy is proclaimed than in all the rest of the Sundays combined”. There is likely some accuracy to this statement, but it is equally likely that the aforementioned heresy is not intentional.

The challenge is how to talk about a mystery. We have a driving desire to unravel any quandary or puzzle we encounter. Otherwise why create experiments to measure unseeable subatomic particles, discover new medications for disease, or on a more mundane end of the spectrum spend hours on jigsaw or word puzzles that tax our minds? We want to know, to understand, and to explore life, and we like answers. We want things to make sense because when they do it gives us a feeling of control and that produces comfort. But, sometimes life leaves us with impenetrable experiences and questions. Look at the Gospel for today of Nicodemus, who John tells us comes to see Jesus at night. It is a euphemism for existing in darkness or blindness and he wants to see and to understand what Jesus represents and reveals—the Reign of God. His dilemma is not lack of desire or lack of love but his starting point. He is stuck in flesh, which is simply a way of saying he is grounded in logic, measurement, rules, and knowledge, and thus comes his confused question about going through the birth process a second time when he is told he must be born *from above*. Something more than logic is at work here. Jesus tells him he has to be grounded in trust. It is the Spirit which creates the capacity to understand, not wittiness that grasps the life of the Spirit, and here is the conundrum (both ancient and modern); we can only see and comprehend God through trust. All other ways of knowing, valuable as they are, will not allow the veil of mystery to be lifted.

There is a story told of St. Augustine, the great philosopher and theologian. He was preoccupied with the doctrine of the Trinity, and he wanted desperately to understand the doctrine of the one God in three persons, and to be able to explain it logically. One day he was walking along the seashore reflecting on this matter, when suddenly he saw a small child all alone on the shore. He noticed that she was very busy with an odd activity. The child would make a hole in the sand, run to the sea with a little cup, fill it with sea water and then run back and empty the cup into the hole she had made in the sand. Back and forth she went, and each time would repeat the action and pour water into the spot she had created. Augustine could contain himself no longer, so he walked up to her and said, “Little child, whatever are you doing?” She replied, “I am trying to empty the sea into this hole.” Augustine then said, “How do you think that you can empty this immense sea into this tiny hole with that tiny cup?” The little girl answered back, “And you, how do you suppose that with your small head you can comprehend the immensity of God?” So, what about it choir members, Vestry, Wardens, servers at the Altar; what do we say to Jesus’ question to Nicodemus? We are baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we cross ourselves at that Name, we end our Psalms with it, we are absolved with it, and blessed in confirmation and marriage by it. Are we teachers and followers in the faith and yet do not

understand? Of course we don't fully understand. So why would the Church or your erstwhile priest foist this into your lives? Because, we do participate in the life of the Trinity, and that participation is wholeness and salvation and seeing life as God has for us.

Let us consider this morning a different approach. Is it possible that while we cannot explain the Trinity, the Holy Trinity explains us, our lives in the faith, and how God creates that life in us? What if the Trinity is imprinted on all creation leaving a divine image? What if that is imprinted on us as well?

Where do we begin? As Anglicans we have a saying that is at the heart of our spiritual life; *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi*—the way we pray, is how we will believe, which leads to how we will live. To put it another way, communication from and with God is the beginning of the whole spiritual life, and we come back to it over and again as we bump up against life's shadows. Communication, intimate communion is the very nature of God, and we participate in it because God has stamped creation with his own image. And by the way, this God has a Name—not 'The Force', but Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Consider for a moment how the world works. At the most elemental levels there is communication taking place. A maple seed contains in it all that is necessary for the beauty of a full tree to unfold. Subatomic particles that are partners alter their spin when one changes. On a human level we too have within us the image of God which calls us to union with him. My wife pointed out once while creating a sculpture of a friend's son, that we never see ourselves fully when we look in a mirror. It is only in 2 dimensions—partial—yet the full person is there. What we do not see is still there and communicates with others and self. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and all that is, visible and invisible..."

Let me suggest this as an analogue to the Holy Trinity. That next phrase in the creed is the clue. "I believe in Jesus Christ...begotten, not made, of one being with the Father..." is a way of saying God brings a perfect replica out of himself, and when they communicate with one another something happens. Fulton Sheen once said they utter a sigh, a breath. *Ruach* is the Hebrew word for when God breaths life, and that sigh is the Holy Spirit. It is the love shared with and for one another. We do not say God *has* love, or God *feels* love, but God *is* love. God communicates love into all creation. The One who creates and brings all that is into being has an intention which is to send the Son into the very spaces that hate God in order to love us into communion, into a relationship with him. He is seeking to make whole what has been broken by sin. "As Moses lifted up the serpent...so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that all who believe (trust) will not perish but have the life of eternity." If you have ever had a defiant child you may get a glimpse of what God is up to in sharing his life with us. You hold onto and love that child so that even their resistance cannot drive a wedge between you. Just as God sent love in the form/image of Jesus, so the Holy Spirit breathes faith and hope and grants us sight. It comes as a gift. To be brought reborn into God's Kingdom is not by craft or human knowledge or even by way of doctrine. It happens when trust in God allows us to see the impenetrable depth of love for us and all. It is love which is eternal and cannot be defeated. We are taken into God's life, into a new place, new situation, new world where the cuffs of sin and guilt have no lasting power.

God, the Holy Trinity, deigns to stoop down and scoop up his children-us, and yes all others who belong to him. In Jesus who is the perfect replica of the Father, that same Father embraces our lives with the joy and sorrow, pain and comfort, questions and hopes we have. All of this is

lifting us into the life of the Trinity. The passage from our Gospel today stops before the real climax, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...”. Why would God do this? Because it is his nature. If you have ever loved someone or do love someone(s) and they ask you why you love them, you can make a cautious list. Perhaps they are beautiful or kind or make you feel good (all of which are self-serving reasons), but the list will get thin and quickly. And none of those explain or answer the question. They do not solve the mystery of communion with another. There is you; there is the one you love; AND there is the Love which interpenetrates and connects you. Our very lives are Trinitarian. The same connection with God is found in our prayer and sacramental life! Perhaps that is why prayer begins when our explanations can no longer explain.

We do not explain who the Holy Trinity is with all of our logic or theological expertise, but who we are is determined and explained by the God who is the Trinity. If we exist and are creatures made in the Image of God, then we are included in the life of the Trinity and our own lives reflect in some way the quality and purpose of that life. It will be life that creates rather destroys, sustains rather than diminishes, enriches instead of draining due to ONE ESSENCE (of one being with the Father)—Divine Love. To give of our-selves in love is to be most ourselves, most real, and most intertwined with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we have to stop explaining and live in the life of the love God which is God. Amen+