

June 7, 2020
Most Holy Trinity

Exodus 34:4b-6, 6-9
Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55
2 Corinthians 13:11-13
John 3:16-18

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

The Gospel reading this morning does well in setting the tenor for today’s homily and the Celebration of the Feast Day of The Most Holy Trinity.

We can celebrate that fact that God does love you and me very much; so much does He love us that He sent His Only Begotten Son from Heaven to earth so that we might have eternal life and live with Him forever. But that’s not all. There is more. He really does want to have an ongoing relationship with us, right now, right here while we are still present on this broken earth; however, to help facilitate that relationship there are a few things we need to know.

For the past two weeks we have been talking about the Holy Spirit and His role in guiding the Church into all truth. Mentioned earlier, God wants us to know Him intimately. When Jesus ascended into Heaven and returned to the right side of His Father, He promised to send the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us until we are reunited with Him in heaven.

Indeed, we have been granted a wonderful privilege in knowing God; however, we need to remember that it was not always so. After Adam and Eve broke the covenant with God in the Garden of Eden there was a time when mankind slowly forgot about honoring God.

Much like our day and age, thinking only of themselves they forgot about the compassion and mercy of God. They forgot He loved them, so they fashioned and made their own gods of anger and hate and war. Unfortunately, they even became so hard-hearted and self-determined, that they literally forgot His name.

The first reading this morning from the book of Exodus contains what we might call an elementary truth or axiom concerning God's name.

Having come down in a cloud, the Lord stood with Moses there and proclaimed his name as the Lord. Thus the Lord passed before him and cried out, 'The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity.'

The Scriptures states Moses at once bowed down to the ground in worship. But here along with Moses we are faced with a question, who is this God that reveals Himself as the Lord? How are we to understand and relate to a God who for all intents and purposes is unknowable?

One of the great mysteries of our Judeo Christian faith is the way God chooses to *reintroduce* himself to His people after mankind has turned their backs to Him.

After man rejected God's Fatherhood in the Genesis Garden of Eden "fall" - and on up to the Great Flood of Noah's time, for the most part history records that mankind imagined God in a plenitude of unthinkable ways. Fashioned in their own images they tried to make God evil and/or benevolent, from angelic to demonic; indeed, mankind invented all kinds of crazy ways to explain the Divine Unknowable.

Thankfully from time to time God reached out to certain individuals. Noah would be a good example, and how exactly and why God contacted Noah is a good question. The likely answer is that He saw that Noah's heart was good, and that intuitively He possessed a simple faith in a God he could not see other than in the works of nature. Needless to say encounters with God were far and in between long periods of silence.

However, on one other occasion some time after the Flood we read that three angelic beings visited a distant relative of Noah, a righteous man known as Abram, and later known as Abraham. Many biblical scholars believe that this story event is the first in the Bible, other than the creation account, "let us create" to illustrate the Trinity, of which we shall soon say more.

However, before we say more about the Blessed Trinity let us talk more about Genesis 18:1-4, because when the Lord God came to visit Abraham and his wife Sarai under the oak trees of Mamre it appears that God was making a major attempt at reconciling with mankind through Abraham and Sarai. The Bible records'

The *Lord* [emphasis mine] appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing

near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground, he said: "Sir, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest under the tree (Gen 18:1-4).

We might ask, how did Abraham know that this visitation was the Lord God of Heaven and Earth? The Bible records that Abraham was a man of faith, and like Noah he was rewarded because he exercised his faith for good and not evil. And here we must note that faith is the key to a meaningful relationship with God.

Undoubtedly, by this time Abraham had already experienced several encounters with the Lord, for example when God called him to leave the land of Ur and then also when He gave him the promise of an abundant land and many children.

I think a reasonable case could be made that when Abraham bowed down low to the ground before the three men or angels he was acknowledging the presence of someone very special. Subsequently, the historical Church has generally taught that the visitation at Mamre was indeed none other than the Person of God.

As a side note, somewhere between 1408 and 1425, the Russian iconographer, Andrei Rublev wrote the now famous icon of the Trinity. It is interesting that in Orthodox iconography the Father is rarely depicted because God cannot be known. So when you see pictures of God the Father in artwork like Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, in reality they are not accurate or even biblical. Thus, in Orthodox theology it is improper for God the Father and/or the Holy Spirit to be presented or represented in any form.

However on the other hand, The Second council of Nicea in AD 787 confirmed that the depiction of Christ was allowed because He became a man; the situation regarding the Father and the Holy Spirit was less clear. Thus, the usual Orthodox representation of the Trinity was through the "Old Testament Trinity" depicted in the three angels visiting Abraham – which was stated in the text to be "the Lord."

The next time we hear of the Lord God revealing Himself to mankind was when the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush. Detailed in the Exodus chapter 3 God said to Moses, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

When Moses later inquired of God he asked, "Indeed when I go to the children of Israel . . . and they ask me 'what is His name?' what shall I tell them? Then God said to Moses, "I AM the Existing One." "Thus you shall say to the Children of Israel: The Lord God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob – sent me to you. This is my name forever, and My memorial to all generations."

In Orthodox theology the name "I Am" is the name of the Essence of God, which is one and undivided. In John chapter 8, when Jesus replied I AM, or I AM the Existing One, the Jews who were listening picked up stones to stone Him because recalling Moses they recognized Jesus was saying that He was one and the same with God, and therefore in their opinion He was guilty of blaspheme and should be put to death (see John 8:56-59).

So let's go back again and dig a little deeper into the first reading today. We know that the progressive revelation of God to His

people continued when God gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. “Having come down in a cloud, the Lord stood with Moses there and proclaimed His name “LORD,” which is the English word for the Hebrew name *Adonai*. The root word *Adon* means, one possessed of absolute control.

Thus the Lord passed before him and cried out, “The Lord, the Lord, or “the one possessed of absolute control.” The Lord a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity.” Hence, Moses, upon hearing of the mercy of God, immediately bowed down to the ground in worship.

Here we have already noted that the mercy of God should indeed compel us as well to bow before the Lord. Unfortunately, sometimes we forget to properly honor God. Moses said, “If I find favor with you, O Lord, do come along in our company. This is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins, and receive us as your own.”

So what does it mean to be stiff-necked person? To be stiff-necked literally means to be a stubborn or obstinate person who insists on living life on his or her own terms. In other words to be stiff-necked means, I am guilty of forgetting the name of God. In worst form to be stiff necked is a refusal to bow before the Presence of God.

All of us, in some form or another, can easily become rather stiff-necked and set in our ways. It doesn't necessarily mean that we are a bad person; it just means that we need to reexamine ourselves from time to time and see if we need to be a little bit more flexible, a little bit more tolerable, a little bit more giving, and not so dead set on expecting our own way.

Read earlier, St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians speaks to the very point with this serious exhortation, "Finally, brothers, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you."

Noteworthy is the instruction to rejoice. Sometimes rejoicing is not easy, especially when we are in the midst of an emotional storm. In times of trial and tribulation, and especially right now we can easily become discouraged, disconnected, and disenfranchised from others whom we love and care for.

In times like these when we are forced to choose between conflicting and polarizing political ideologies we must 'remember' that we are not of this world or its conflicting philosophies. We belong to a King and a kingdom not of this earth and therefore it behooves us to take our focus off from political affiliations and their biased news outlets – which in many ways exacerbate our troubling circumstances and place our trust in "The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity." Its time we take a stand with the One With Absolute Control Who Alone Is Just and Wise.

St. Paul continues, "Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you." Here the beloved Apostle encourages the faithful to support one another. There is no place for division within the Body of Christ. For as the Most Holy Trinity is one in essence, so must the Body of Christ also strive to become one in energy and action. Unity comes as a result of sincere efforts to encourage one another, live in peace, and trust the Lord that He will provide in the day of our trial.

God will never ask you or me to do what He has not already experienced. Hence the love that exists within the Blessed Holy Trinity serves as the one true model of unity for the Body of Christ.

So in closing let us be reminded that every day offers a choice as to whom or what we will invite into our hearts and minds. Abraham chose to invite the Three in One into his home, and he was blessed out of his sandals with a new future. And so just like Adam and Eve, we too get to choose what or whom we will love and serve; so let us learn from their mistakes and choose wisely.

“Blessed be God the Father and His only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit: for He has shown us that He [truly] loves us more than what we could ever hope or imagine.

Glory and praise forever.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.