

June 12, 2022
The Most Holy Trinity

Proverbs 8:22-31
Psalm 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Romans 5:1-5
John 16:12-15

Today we are celebrating the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. In this morning's Gospel reading Jesus said to his disciples, "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when He comes, the Spirit of truth, He will guide you to all truth."

Thus the Entrance Antiphon for today's Mass does well in setting the tenor for this week's homily, "Blessed be God the Father, and His only-begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit: for He has shown us His merciful love."

From beginning to end the purpose of the Bible is to reveal the ineffable mystery of God to those who endeavor to know, love, and serve Him. Created for fellowship with God, St Paul reminds us that we have been justified by faith, a precious gift given by God to each man and woman, yet a faith that must on our part be exercised in order to develop and grow.

John 15:16 also reminds us, "We did not choose God, but He chose us and appointed us that we should go and bear fruit, and *that* our fruit should remain, that whatever we ask the Father in His name He may give it to us." Thus, you and I were preordained to be happy with God in heaven forever.

Hence the reason we continue to study the Scriptures, maintain the wisdom of Sacred Tradition, and observe the history of the Church – it is so we can do all that we can to respond lovingly to God, and live in harmony and unity with those in the community of faith.

As a rule, the designated Scripture readings on any given Solemnity or feast day help to explain the meaning of that holy day. For example the Scripture readings associated with the birth of Christ help us to better understand the reasons for the Incarnation and the Nativity of the Son of God.

The Scripture readings about the baptism of Jesus help us to better understand the Sacrament of Baptism and the forgiveness of sin. However, in today's context the opposite is true. The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity actually helps us to better understand the Scripture as it reveals the mystery of the Triune God.

When asked to explain the nature of the Most Holy Trinity, most people find themselves at a loss for words. We pray, sing, and teach about the Blessed Trinity, yet we find it impossible to intellectually explain the essence of the Holy Three in One. However, think about it, how could we ever expect to completely comprehend or grasp the awesomeness of such a mystery. Hence many have commented that it is much easier to describe the Trinity in terms of who the Trinity is not - than try to explain the unexplainable Cloud of Unknowing.

Nevertheless, as orthodox Old Catholic Christians, we purpose to continue worshipping the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, - confessing as true that all three persons are one and the same God. Hence the historical Church believes and teaches that the Trinity is three divine persons who share in one essence. Furthermore, there never was a time when any one person of the Trinity did not exist. In other words, all three persons are consubstantial with each other, they are of one essence, and they are coeternal.

Though difficult to understand - the above theological description regarding the Trinity is a great starting point in apologetics and/or for evangelization because it undermines all other heresies and cultish claims to authenticity. For the most part, to be defined as classically Christian - means to wholly embrace the Nicene Creed, which as you already know acknowledges the existence of the Most Holy Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For the record, it is important to note that the word Trinity cannot be found in the Bible; and as far as that goes neither can you find the word rapture, Eucharist, sacrament, or the phrase, “accept Jesus into your heart.” As a side note, neither is the word photosynthesis found in the Bible, but somehow plants continue to grow in the sunlight without a biblical explanation that precisely identifies the scientific theory or laws associated with how plants derive energy from the sun.

The point here is that just because the word Trinity is not actually found in the Bible doesn't mean that God is not revealed in trinitarian terms. Unfortunately there are some religious groups whose tenants deny even the notion of a trinitarian God.

Their refusal to believe in a Trinitarian God often stems from either a scientific skepticism or a hyper *sola scriptura* or “scripture only” mind set, where if the word or term is not clearly spelled out in the sacred text then acceptance of oral tradition, historical precedence, or any metaphor or analogy is either discouraged and/or prohibited.

We mentioned earlier that mystery plays an important role in our worship. Knowing that any theological explanations of the Trinity was inadequate, the Early Church Fathers as early as the 2nd century

were led to use artistic forms as a way to illustrate the mystery of the Trinity – especially when worded explanations were inadequate and/or not plausible.

Early Christian artwork can readily be found in the catacombs. For example, contrary to some rigid beliefs about baptismal immersion, early drawings of the Baptism of Jesus show Jesus standing in water and John the Baptist pouring water from a shell over His head.

According to Church history and tradition, the use of simple icons dates back to St. Luke who allegedly wrote an icon of the Virgin Mary. Another example to consider is *The Image of the Savior Not Made by Hand*. Tradition has it that this icon was inspired by a face towel bearing the facial image of Jesus that was used to heal a man who could not come to Him.

So then back to the Most Holy Trinity, we need to ask, did God actually reveal himself in the Scriptures as three separate and divine persons who share in one essence, and if so how are we to respond to such a mystery?

We begin by turning first to the Bible. What *can* we glean from the Bible concerning the Trinity? Time prohibits a review of all the trinitarian passages; however I would like to once again bring up one Old Testament passage from the Book of Genesis. It is the account of the Lord visiting Abraham and his wife Sara under the oak trees of Mamre.

The *Lord* [emphasis mine] appeared to Abraham by the oak 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).

Many biblical scholars believe this passage is the first in the Bible, other than the creation account in Genesis, "let *us* create man in our own image" to illustrate the Trinity. Here we might consider the popular notion that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Somewhere between 1408 and 1425, Andrei Rublev, a Russian iconographer wrote the now famous icon of the Trinity. It is interesting that in Russian iconography the Father is rarely depicted in art form because God cannot be known, and to do so could be considered by some as idolatry. However, The Second council of Nicea in AD 787 confirmed or restored the notion that the depiction of Christ was allowed in iconic art form because He became man; the situation regarding the Father was less clear.

Thus, the usual Orthodox Christian representation of the Trinity is best illustrated in the "Old Testament Trinity" where in the sacred text the three angels visiting Abraham were identified to be "the Lord."

Needless to say and mentioned earlier, we know that much of what we understand concerning the Bible comes to us in the form of mystery. Mystery is unexplainable. Mystery cannot be accurately described or precisely measured hence the usage of Icons and material elements such as fire, water, incense, bread and wine and oil. Needless to say intuition and faith and revelation and wisdom have a major role in discerning the hidden essence of mystery.

For example, let's consider today's OT reading. The author introduces us to a mysterious being known as Lady Wisdom. Who is this allusive woman? Proverbs 7:4 gives us a clue, "Say to Wisdom, 'You are my sister!' Call Understanding, 'Friend!'" Proverbs 9:1 records, Wisdom has built *her* house" (emphasis mine).

Interestingly, her monologue in chapter 8 represents her longest discourse in the Book of Proverbs. Yet for all we read about her, we still know very little about who she is. Is she a Jewish metaphor, an analogy, the subject of a fable, or just a feminine figure of speech? In the final analysis, nothing less than an absolute mystery can define her being.

Going back to the idea that from cover to cover Scripture slowly reveals the personhood of God, I am intrigued by the possibility that in the OT Scriptures, Lady Wisdom, known as *hokhmah* in Hebrew and *Sophia* in the Greek; and by the way, both names are feminine names, might actually be one way God the Father chose to gradually reveal the mystery and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Here some western theologians have a problem with God being depicted in feminine terms, but apparently not so with God, even though He chose to reveal himself with the masculine noun Father and pronoun He, nevertheless He imbues all the true feminine characteristics known to both women and men; after all we are made in the image of God, male and female He created them.

Back to the text concerning Lady Wisdom, she reports, "When the Lord established the heavens I was there . . . then was I beside him as his craftsman." In other words, even from the very beginning of the early creation Wisdom was there.

Jesus said to His disciples, "I have much to tell you, but you can not bear it now. I don't know about you but I feel certain that there is a whole lot more that I don't know about the ways of God than I do know. Thus, we really do need supernatural guidance and wisdom. Thankfully Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide us to all truth, and with God all things are possible.

Therefore as we allow the Holy Spirit to draw us deeper into Scripture, the mystery of the Sacraments, the contemplation of Icons, and the beauty of the liturgy and prayer let us not fear or shy away from the uncertainty of mystery for what we may want to be evidence that demands a verdict. Again there is a whole lot more about God that we cannot prove than what we can absolutely prove intellectually and/or scientifically.

Far be it from anyone to think that they have all the answers about God, the Bible, or Divine revelation. From such a one stay far away, but instead seek His Presence with divine spirit led wisdom. My sense is that in these matters we can never go wrong by following the advice of St Vincent of Lerins who died in 455 Ad. His now famous Canon is a three-fold test to assess the orthodoxy of an idea, stating that only those things can be considered part of the Catholic deposit of faith which have been believed "everywhere, always, by all."

So, before we close let me offer one last familiar typology regarding the Holy Trinity – the Sacrament of Matrimony. St Paul infamously stated, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each one of you so love his own wife as himself,

and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (see Ephesians 5:20-30).

Here the sacred texts describe the Sacrament of Matrimony as a man leaving his parents, joining himself to his wife and the two becoming one flesh. However, the concept of one flesh is much more than a physical relationship. The archetype or prime example by which we understand the Sacrament of Matrimony is the hypostatic Holy Trinity, and the relationship between Christ and the Church. The result is that a man and a woman covenant with God to become one as co-creators with Him in procreation.

The human love story in matrimony is mystery, sacramental, and trinitarian, not in the sense of a puzzle to be solved, but in the sense of a reality that we cannot fathom. For in God the Holy Trinity there is unimaginably intense unity, and an unimaginably rich distinction: there is one Fatherhood, one Sonship, one Holy Spirit proceeding-as-Love, which are too distinct to be added together to make anything at all like three Gods. It is that unity in distinction, distinction in unity, which is reflected in the coming together in marriage of man and woman, of male and female.

Therefore, Christ and the Church is the archetypal paradigm to be followed and revered. Thus, the man and the woman are the material elements, likened to the bread and wine brought and offered in the Eucharistic rite that when covenantally joined with God in ceremony and ritual, they become transformed holy and sanctified – transformational food bringing forth new life to a lost and hungry dying world.

+ “Blessed be God the Father, and His only-begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit: for He has shown us His merciful love.” Amen