

May 30, 2021
The Most Holy Trinity

Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40
Psalm 33:4-5, 6, 9, 18-19, 20, 22
Romans 8:14-17
Matthew 28:16-20

Today we are celebrating the Solemnity of The Most Holy Trinity, a sacred observance dating back as far as the tenth century. For this reason, the entrance antiphon does well in setting the tenor for this morning's homily: "Blessed be God the Father and His only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit: for He has shown us His merciful love."

You may not have ever thought about it, but the word Trinity cannot be found in the Bible, as far as that goes neither is the word rapture, Eucharist, sacrament, or the modern popular phrase "you must accept Jesus into your heart." As a side note neither is the word photosynthesis in the Bible, yet somehow plants continue to grow in the sunlight without a biblical explanation that precisely explains the science of plant regeneration.

However, because the word Trinity is not in the sacred text per say, many people struggle with the idea of God being one - yet three distinct persons. Therefore because there are so many different ideas and positions on the Trinity, I would like to ask that we consider what I trust will be accurate information from an orthodox Old Catholic theological perspective in regards to the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity.

Notice here I used the word mystery. Indeed, even the very notion of the blessed Trinity is a mystery. If you recall from last week's homily we mentioned that in essence God is ineffable. In other words God is beyond the capacity of the sum total of all human

knowledge and wisdom to even begin to conceive of the mere thought of God, let alone think one could begin to comprehend such a mystery. Yet think about it - for all His omnipotence and omniscience, God chose to reveal Himself to His creation.

Seriously, just stop to think about it for a moment, God, who is totally un-knowable, God who is beyond our wildest imagination, God who had no other reason other than pure love itself has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind in history as recorded in the Bible.

Needless to say, much of what we believe from the Bible comes to us in the form of mystery and subsequently we must receive its message in faith. Yes faith, but not blind faith. You see mystery is unexplainable and it is often handed down from one generation to another, but it does not mean that what is revealed in mystery is not true. Therefore because mystery cannot be accurately described or precisely measured; it takes faith to discover its hidden essence. Thus, as Old Catholic Christians our faith is biblically based, and subsequently it cannot contradict the historically expressed revelation of God to the Apostles and the early church.

Nevertheless, mystery *is* part of the equation and we must embrace it in lieu of human reasoning. For example consider the Catechism of the Catholic Church that states,

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in Himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the “hierarchy of the truths of faith.” The whole history of salvation is identical

with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men “and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin (CCC 234).

But what do we do when we find ourselves struggling with a theological topic as serious as the Trinity. In other words when mystery, history, faith, and biblical writings seem to collide in confusion what do we do? A case in point; one scripture verse that is problematic for both Jew and Moslem, and even for some Christians is Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.”

Taken literally as written it is easy to understand why some folks would have a problem with the idea of the Trinity. The argument being that God is one not three. Their argument is essentially correct and Trinitarians would also agree, God is indeed one, but He is also three in one. Indeed God is "one but not solitary" as the fourth-century Nicene Creed states.

The fact of the matter is the Church has wrestled with these types of questions for centuries. The best advice I can give in these types of situations is to follow counsel of St Vincent Lerins, “that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all. That is [what is] truly and properly 'Catholic'

For example and paraphrasing the Catechism here again the Universal Church rests in the wisdom of the living Tradition of St Matthew as recorded that Jesus commanded that all Christians are to be baptized in the “Name”—not “Names”—of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Therefore orthodox Christians are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: not in their names, for there is only one God, the almighty Father, his

only Son, and the Holy Spirit: the Most Holy Trinity. (Paraphrased CCC 233).

Indeed concerning this most interesting subject, time prohibits a more thorough review of Jewish and Christian history and all of the many Trinitarian passages in the Bible; however for your consideration I would like to bring up two Old Testament passages from the Book of Genesis. The first is Genesis 1:26, “Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

Here we must ask, why did God say let *us*? Hence, we might argue that when God said *us* He was in fact implying we. Again, the historical church reasons that God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” because He was referring to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And so man was created in the image of God with a body, soul, and spirit.

The second passage of Scripture we would like to mention is Genesis 18:1-4. Many biblical scholars believe this passage is the first in the Bible, other than the creation account, “let us create” to illustrate the Trinity. 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).

Here we might ask, how did Abraham know that this visitation was the Lord? To begin, when the angels visited Abraham he had already by this time experienced several encounters with the Lord God. For example, when God called him to leave the land of Ur and gave him the promise of an abundant land and many children. The Bible records Abraham was a man of faith, and subsequently he was rewarded because of his faith. I think a good case could be made that Abraham was a man who was open to the leading of God, and as a result God was willing to reveal himself to him.

From Abraham forward and on up to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God was known to the nation of Israel as the God of the living. God told Moses, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Scripture records, "Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look on God" (Exodus 3:14-15).

Because mankind was restricted from seeing God, the Early Church used art forms to tell the story of salvation from as early as the 2nd century. Artwork can readily be found in the catacombs, and according to tradition, the use of simple icons goes all the way back to St. Luke who allegedly wrote an icon of the Virgin Mary, and copied *The Image of the Savior Not Made by Hand*.

Following sacred tradition and 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 because God cannot be known. However, The Second council of Nicaea in AD 787 confirmed that the depiction of Christ was allowed because He became man; however, the situation regarding the Father was less clear. Thus, the usual Orthodox representation of the Trinity was

through the "Old Testament Trinity" of the three angels visiting Abraham - said in the text to be "the Lord."

Mentioned earlier, probably one of the most significant biblical proof texts for the Trinity is found in today's gospel reading. Otherwise known as the Great Commission, Jesus -just before He ascended into Heaven instructed His disciples, "All power in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded."

Here some may ask, are there references to this subject from sources other than the Bible? The answer is yes. For example consider the *Didache*, a description of early Jewish/Christian life written most likely before the Gospel of Matthew, which was written around AD 50. Here in chapter 7 the *Didache* states,

1. Concerning baptism, baptise thus: Having first rehearsed all these things, "baptise, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," in running water;
2. But if thou hast no running water, baptise in other water, and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm.
3. But if thou hast neither, pour water three times on the head "in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost (*Didache* ch. 7).

So here is the bottom line. What we do not want to do is end up in arguments with folks concerning the Blessed Trinity. Arguments only result in a fight to determine who is right and who is wrong. The truth of the matter is -Only God is right - all human ideas and theories are flawed to a certain extent. The fact is the only reason

we can even conceive of God is because of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Instead of arguments let us be open to engage in honest discussions concerning the Trinity where we can critically and openly discuss both Scripture and Tradition, and Church history without fear of reprisal. In that way God is honored and people are encouraged to grow in spiritual knowledge and wisdom.

In the mean time, *The Solemnity of The Most Holy Trinity* is a special day for our Church. Being the namesake of our community of faith, it is also our adopted public birth date as we begin our 12th year of ministry here in this community. Thus *this* humble Community of Faith is earnestly dedicated to,

The Most Holy Trinity who is One God, yet there are Three who are God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—perfectly united and never divided yet not merged into one with no proper distinction.¹

Therefore in preparing to celebrate in the Eucharist, may I suggest that we offer our lives in unity, along with the fruit of our hands - the bread and the wine, as a living sacrifice, and then in return, receive the gift of the Father, which is the Body and Blood of His Son - revealed in the power of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life as we together contemplate the sacred mystery of The Most Holy Trinity.

Blessed be God forever. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Same position as that of the Orthodox Church in America, <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/doctrine-scripture>