

Sunday after Pentecost Cycle A: THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

FIRST READING: Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9

A reading from the Book of Exodus:

Early in the morning Moses went up Mount Sinai as the LORD had commanded him, taking along the two stone tablets. Having come down in a cloud, the LORD stood with Moses there and proclaimed his name, "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." Moses at once bowed down to the ground in worship. Then he 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."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56

Glory and praise for ever!

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever; And blessed is your holy and glorious name, praiseworthy and exalted above all for all ages.

Glory and praise for ever!

Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, praiseworthy and glorious above all forever.

Glory and praise for ever!

Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

Glory and praise for ever!

Blessed are you who look into the depths from your throne upon the cherubim, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

Glory and praise for ever!

SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

A reading from second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters, 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. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the holy ones greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: John 3:16-18

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might 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. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Today's feast of the Holy Trinity is different than the feast of Christmas, Easter or Pentecost. Those feasts celebrate an historical event: the birth of Jesus, Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit into the Church. This is a feast that celebrates a key dogma of the Christian Church. It is by nature a dogma of faith. Yet, behind the dogmatic mystery of God is a profound experience. We can be filled with wonder and awe from the world around us. The beauty of late spring into summer shows us God's power of creation and renewal. Our personal and communal response to COVID 19 shows God's compassion and love through our personal and communal actions. The killing of a black man can show us that fallen humanity still needs God's redemptive mercy. A threat of a virus that can destroy health and security, a threat of violence can unhinge the common good and the cycle of new life can be windows into divinity.

As much as I fear this virus to which most of us can still be infected and the violence to society based on bigotry that can still touch us all, I know that the grace of God can lead each and all of us from sin to new life in Jesus through the magnificent outpouring of love that is the Holy Spirit. This is my faith in God. This is my hope in God. This is the source of my charity and love in God. We face an uncertain world with its disease, violence, lies and injustice. Only with God can there be transformation and peace.

The dogma of the Trinity is this. There is one God. There are three persons in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is Love. The love of the father begot the Son. The love of the Father and Son spirated the Spirit. To spirate is an archaic English word that means to breathe. Put into modern English, the love of the Father and the Son breathed the Spirit. God is Holy. To us, this constitutes a mystery. One in three and three in one does not make sense. The reality of the trinity always was, is and will be. God is eternal. God has no beginning and will have no end. So when did this happen? We are temporal beings living now, remembering the past and anticipating the future. God told Moses his name, I Am Who Am. God is always Now with no past and with no future. God, in eternity, relates to us in time. God is completely other to us, but God is like us as well. Jesus, God's Eternal Word and Only Begotten Son, became a human being through birth as one like us in every thing but sin. Jesus lived, loved, wept, laughed, suffered and died as a human being. Jesus interacted with people just as we do. He rose from the dead and promised us resurrection too when he returns to establish the Kingdom of God at the end of this age. The Holy Spirit entered the world at Pentecost and through Jesus breath upon the disciples.

Each of us believes in God. We seek God in our experiences of life. All of us have caught glimpses of God in moments of joy, delight and wonder. We have also caught glimpses of God through our sin, fear and doubt. St. Paul said it well, "when I am weakest I experience God's strength the most, working within me." We have all known forgiveness, comfort and clarity throughout our lives. As I type and as you read, now, God is at work in us; God has brought us to this moment. Through God's grace we have become the persons we are.

Usually, when I have preached on Trinity Sunday, I present the Church's teaching on the Trinity. That's all I can do in ten to fifteen minutes. This is not a homily I preach but a reflection I write. I mostly omit the message in the day's scripture. When I preach you are part of a captive congregation. Here you are not. If my reflection is too long, or God forbid boring, you can freely ignore this reflection and put it down, hopefully for later. Today's readings are beautiful and powerful. They reflect the lived experience of our ancestors in faith and the spoken words of Jesus which reveal who God is.

Moses climbed God's mountain to encounter God. On Sinai, God encountered Moses. I like to read this experience. It was personal for God and Moses. The meeting solidified Moses' faith and likewise the faith of the Hebrew people. I also think that as we pray to God we seek to remain in God's presence. Like on Sinai, God comes to remain with each of us. Prayer is a mutual experience. I like to note that prayer isn't just about what we bring to God. How many times, when I have preached, have you found yourself miles away as you thought of something else? As much as my ego would want you to hang on my every word, you are not being distracted. God has brought you to the things he wanted for your

prayer. As St. Paul has said, “when we do not know how to pray properly, then the Spirit personally makes our petitions for us in groans that cannot be put into words; and he who can see into all hearts knows what the Spirit means because the prayers that the Spirit makes for God’s holy people are always in accordance with the mind of God.” The Holy Spirit has merely brought to our attention that which God intended for us to pray. It happens to me too and I always welcome those experiences for God has brought me into his presence as God did Moses. This same thing can happen when people pray the rosary. People forget that the sheer multiplication of Hail Marys is not the prayer but are prayers which lead to prayer. This may sound like “who’s on first,” but behind all the Hail Marys are the mysteries of the rosary. As we pray there are also our own mysteries as well. The Holy Spirit is more part of our lives than we are aware. Once we become aware of the mystery of the Trinity, the mystery of God in our lives, we experience being on the mountain top more often. Closeness to God’s mystery can lead to deeper intimacy with God.

Paul’s message to the Corinthians is also powerful. Its beauty is especially poignant for today. His advice leads to a strengthening of community and of interpersonal bonds. To listen, to seek peace, to encourage others and to agree with one another is a painful reminder of who we are not. It is difficult for us to mend our ways and to change our behavior. For us it is impossible. It is not impossible for God. We can forget that even though we experience division with others and opposition against others, Jesus has made us one as God is one. The oneness of the Trinity is the model of the oneness that is possible for all God’s children. Who are God’s children? Every one created in God’s image and likeness. The entire human race is made in God’s image and likeness. We are all God’s children. We are able to see God in every one we meet. Jesus command is to love one another as God first loved each of us. God’s command is not to like one another. Some people we just can’t stand. Love is not the same as like. Love means that we seek God in all people. Love means that we forgive others as God forgives us. Love means that we treat one another as we want them to treat us. This, with God’s grace, we can do.

The ancient greeting within this passage, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you,” is familiar to all of us because that is the greeting we use, often, at mass. It is the greeting I like to use. It is also a powerful prayer and blessing. Today this is primarily a liturgical greeting. In Paul’s time it was a universal greeting. Today we say hello or hi to people when we meet them. Whereas I am not lamenting the greeting of our secular society, there is a benefit to greet people with prayer. Prayer can remind us of our mission to live in Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit as we seek the face of God in each person we meet. Every time I read this passage I have a knee-jerk reaction to respond, “And also with you.” I note that the revised translation has not entered my response.

Years ago as a kid, I would see, while watching any sports event on television, someone, in the crowd, lift a poster or sign, John 3:16. After seeing this several times, I finally went to our family bible to look the passage up. It was the beginning of this passage which is the basic kerygmatic statement of Christianity. “God so loved the world that he sent his only son to be our savior, so that all who believe may have eternal life.” John Lennon sang “Love is all you need.” He was half right. We need faith first. Faith in God and in Jesus is all we need for salvation. Faith is a gift that God gives each of us. God gives the gift in God’s own time, not ours. We take this passage’s condemnations of people who refuse to believe. There was an historical situation that prompted those strong words. The followers of Jesus began to be first ignored and then persecuted. The more resistance and persecution they experienced the more they began to lash out at others. We experience the same kinds of things today. It was just as difficult for Christian then to respond in faith to others as it is for us. The better thing for us to do is to place unbelievers or people who fall away into God’s loving providence; God provides in God’s time, not ours. Doctrine and dogma have developed through time.

As I write, this is Thursday; it is the day after the City of Chicago began to roll back the restrictions imposed in mid March in response to the COVID 19 threat. The infection rate seems to have reached a

plateau. It has hovered around one thousand new cases a day for a while now. I point out that the disease is still spreading and there is no treatment or vaccine. There is no cure and few of us have immunity. As one who is in the high risk category of death from this disease, I want to err on the side of caution. We at Divine Savior are “gearing up” to reopen. Fr. Lobianco is a year younger than I. We will both be on the front line soon and susceptible. I know that good religious intentions and fervent faith guide our lives and help us to find meaning in what may feel meaningless. It is naïve to think that because we are Catholic we are immune. As a community of faith our witness must continue to keep one another safe. Social distancing, washing of hands and isolation if exposed to the disease is the only way we can do this. We must work to our common good. Only through God’s grace can we prevent this forestall this disease. God will work through us.

I pray that you are safe and sound as you help keep others so.

James D. Beath
June 6-7, 2020