

Feast of the Most Holy Trinity June 11, 2017

Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; John 3:16-18

Today we celebrate the solemnity of the Holy Trinity, the feast of the Triune God manifested in three persons, the Father, Son and the Spirit. In our practice of Christian Life, the Trinity is remembered often in prayer and during the daily routine by every Christian. Each time we make the sign of the cross, as we did at the beginning of this celebration, we say: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In the second reading of today Paul reminds the people of the Father's love, the grace that comes through Jesus Christ and the fellowship or the unifying power of the Holy Spirit. The intimate relationship between the Father, Son and the Spirit is described in various places in the Gospel of John. Even though we remember the Trinity several times a day, it is difficult to comprehend the full meaning because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit we invoke constitute a great Mystery. The Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity consists of this: the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three gods, but only one God with three attributes. We have Father who is the creator, Son the redeemer and Holy Spirit the sanctifier and the counselor. If one were to seek for a comparison in order to try to grasp a little of this mystery, the only one that is completely adequate is that which Jesus himself gave us, when he said that just as the living Father has sent him, he is sending out his disciples. They have to go and baptize all in the name of the Trinity. He also tells us that he and the Father are one and he will send the Spirit on the Apostles who will counsel and guide them in the mission.

If we expected today's readings to give us a clear and elaborate presentation of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, we discover that they simply do not. The doctrine of three persons in one God, equal in divinity yet distinct in personality, is not explicitly spelt out in the Bible. In fact the very word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible. The teaching about the Trinity is one of the most fundamental doctrines in our Christian faith yet not explicitly found as such in the New Testament. We have only limited biblical passages to support that in the fullness of God, there are three distinct Persons. In the closing verses of the Gospel of Matthew Jesus told His disciples, to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Paul in the Second Letter to the Corinthians exhorts the community to live in peace and invokes on them the blessings of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. We have this teaching from Jesus who calls God Abba Father and the Spirit as his advocate and his oneness with them. He speaks of the unity of love between these three persons and tells the disciples

that if they have seen him they have seen the Father too. He tells them that through the Trinity they will experience the love and forgiveness. Specific roles however are attributed to them, namely, Father as the Creator, Son as the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier.

Jesus explicitly teaches us about his close union with the Father and the Spirit. We see the Trinity at work at the incarnation when Gabriel announces that Mary is having favor with God and the Spirit will come and Jesus will dwell in her womb. In the Holy Eucharist is manifested the fullness of the Blessed Trinity. As the Father and the Holy Spirit remained in Jesus while he was on earth, the Father and the Holy Spirit dwell in Jesus in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist bodily. At the Holy Mass the priest begins the celebration of the sacrifice in the name of the Trinity concludes the Holy Mass with a solemn blessing, again in the name of the Holy Trinity. In all of the Catholic liturgy, we find references to the presence of the Blessed Trinity, at Confirmations, during the administration of the Sacrament of Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, the Holy Orders and Matrimony, at funerals, at vigils, at the hours of adoration and at every liturgical celebration. The Holy Trinity is mentioned in both, the blessing of persons and of objects.

In the first reading of today we have God speaking to Moses and pointing to the special character of Yahweh that he is a merciful and gracious God. He calls him as a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness, word later repeated in the book of Psalms, in the story of Jonah and elsewhere in the Bible. God is patient with the weaknesses of Israel, slow to grow angry with them, disposed to treat them with kindness and always faithful to the covenant he made with Israel. Moses the leader of his people had been with God and points out to him of his mercy and kindness and how he is their personal God who has taken such care of them. Encouraged by the favour God had displayed towards him, Moses petitions God to come along in the company of the people. He asks God to overlook the fact that they are a stiff-necked people and consistently turned away from the God particularly when they made the golden calf and worshipped it. Moses pleads for the people and asks his forgiveness. God in his generosity forgives them and gives them the ten commands written on the two tablets for the people to observe. People affirm their commitment to the Lord.

In the second reading which is the final section of his letter, Paul salutes the people of Corinth in the name of the Trinity. He invites them to live in peace and harmony, agree with one another and then the God of peace will be with them. He tells them that by our union with Christ we are taken up in the family of the Trinity. Then he concludes his greetings with this lovely Trinitarian

prayer we often use as a greeting at the beginning of Mass and in the liturgy: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with you all." The grace of Lord Jesus Christ is God's creative transforming love. In other words God himself is seeking freely to give his own self to us. When he says the love of God it means it is the all-embracing love of God made known to us in Jesus who is love. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is unique, meaning the communion, sharing or participation. It is an intimate and intense relationship indicating a model of peace, harmony and love. It can reach out to all people and cover every situation. It is the fellowship with which Paul invites them to support and encourage each other to live in harmony and peace.

In the Gospel of today, Nicodemus was sufficiently troubled about Jesus' claim to have come from God that he came to Jesus to look into it for himself. He came at night because as a member of Jews' select ruling body he had a lot to lose if he was ever found with Jesus. Jesus' words to Nicodemus show that it was God, all three persons who started the whole process of redemption and the reason for this was his love for humanity. Jesus tells him that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world that all may have life through him. Nicodemus is told that God's love is not only deep and personal but also universal. He loves not one nation but the entire world and wants to give his life to them. He will love us into a quality of life beyond our dreams. However, all who face Jesus reveal themselves and so was Nicodemus. But John does not tell us clearly whether he was converted to Jesus or not. We do not know whether his hesitation came from his lack of docility because he was a leader or his fear of consequences to his career ambitions or his lack of decisiveness because he was an intellectual. Nicodemus seems to be a symbol of those who have partial faith in Jesus. We hear finally this person at the burial of Jesus for he remained a good but secret disciple of Jesus.

The feast of the Most Holy Trinity is a mystery and a mystery is precisely something that one does not fully understand. This does not mean that we are unable to express anything at all concerning this reality; on the contrary, we are able, thanks to what Jesus told us, to describe this mystery a little and to grasp it through comparisons and images. Our faith tells us that these three persons are indeed distinct and yet together. And that God is closely associated with human kind that he sent his son and also he sent his own spirit. The Father is at the origin of the Most Holy Trinity: he is its principle. The Father gives life to his Son: from all eternity, the Father begets his Son. The Son continuously receives life from his Father as he tells us that he lives because of the Father. The first person is the Father and he is called Father because he is

the source of life for the son. The second person is called the Son because he receives his life from the Father. Father and Son love each other with a love more complete and perfect than we can imagine. Their love is so perfect that it is a person, the Holy Spirit. The third person then is the personal love between Father and Son and is the bond of Union between the Father and the Son. Yet in our practice of faith there is no other words remembered than the names of Father Son and the Spirit and this Trinity is needed for us to fully live our Christian life. In the doxology at the Eucharist we say, Through Him, with Him and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours Almighty Father.

The mystery of the Trinity tells us that the Son is not the Father, and the Father is not the Son; and yet both are but a single God. When the Son receives everything from the Father, he becomes similar to the Father, sharing what is proper to his Father. Finally, if there is a spirit that presides over the whole of this Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, it is the spirit of love, for it is truly love that leads the Father to give to his Son all that he has, and similarly, it is love that leads the Son to give back to his Father what he had been given by him. This divine Person is similar to the Father to some extent, and it is said to be spirited by the Father and the Son. This divine Person is called the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father. The Holy Spirit is not the Father and is not the Son, but all three are a single God. This is why the Holy Spirit is nothing other than the Love of God personified. Hence the feast today reminds us that God is a family of love. We are dealing not just with some terribly abstract theological doctrine, still less with a mathematical contradiction but that we proclaim our firm belief that in one God there are three Persons. What Scripture reveals to us is a unity of three real persons. Of course, to try to understand fully how one God can be three Persons is not really possible for us. We need faith and trust in the word of God that this Trinitarian God is always in our life who guides us protects us and makes our being a reality.

We see God as Father, the origin and creator of all life and dependent existence. This Person is the origin and goal, the Alpha and Omega, of all things, of all life. This Person is the source of all Truth and Love, a Person of Mercy and Compassion, the source of all Wisdom. And our hearts will find not rest until they rest in Him-Her. To the Father is attributed all that we understand by generation, creation and maintenance. Everything we do to awaken and cherish new life, to fashion, to shape and to develop our physical environment, shares in that work of the heavenly Father. In Jesus, the transcendent and unknowable God is presented in a form, which helps us to

have some understanding of his real nature and to reach out to him. All human works of compassion, healing, reconciling, service, forgiveness and making amends reflect the work of redemption and reconciliation and are identified more closely with the Son. He is indeed the protector and care taker. Finally, we see God as Spirit forming us, guiding us, teaching us, moving us, comforting and strengthening us. We find God through his Spirit acting in and through us, in and through others. The Holy Spirit is reflected in every positive idea and inspiration, however slight and humble, in every advance in knowledge and wisdom, in every flash of imagination or movement of the heart.

Let us remember today that 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". For us Christians this feast can be a reminder to pray with much greater meaning and respectfulness than most common of all prayers, so common we hardly think of it as a prayer - the Sign of the Cross. It combines both the mystery of the Trinity and mystery of our salvation through Jesus' suffering, death and rising to life. It contains in so few words and a simple movement of the arm all that we believe in and all that we live for. Let us resolve to make this sign with greater dignity and reverence and in a spirit of real prayer. Let us turn to God in the community of his Persons, a community of perfect sharing and equality. It is in his image that we have been created and it is to grow ever more into his image that we are called. It is a world of harmony, peace and joy.

The story is told of St Augustine of Hippo, a great philosopher and theologian who wanted so much to understand the doctrine of the Trinity and to be able to explain it logically. One day as he was walking along the sea shore and reflecting on this, he suddenly saw a little child all alone on the shore. The child made a hole in the sand, ran to the sea with a little cup, filled her cup, came and poured it into the hole she had made in the sand. Back and forth she went to the sea, filled her cup and came and poured it into the hole. Augustine went up to her and said, "Little child, what are you doing?" and she replied, "I am trying to empty the sea into this hole." "How do you think," Augustine asked her, "that you can empty this immense sea into this tiny hole and with this tiny cup?" To which she replied, "And you, how do you suppose that with this your

small head you can comprehend the immensity of God?" With that the child disappeared.