

TRINITY SUNDAY - B - 2006
“Breathing the Breath of God”

The Holy Trinity; for years, we’ve tried to unlock the mystery of the Trinity. Unfortunately, we were intimidated by the word “mystery.” To many, the Trinity simply became that truth of faith they accepted and then pretty much dismissed. In fact, the late Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner said, *“Should the doctrine of the Trinity be dropped as false tomorrow, the major part of religious literature would remain virtually unchanged.”* In fact, some have said that 95% of our lives as Christians would be unchanged. How can this be? The Trinity is the uniquely Christian understanding of God. Doesn’t it make any difference? Or it is simply misunderstood?

I realized I needed to understand the importance of the Trinity better myself. I want to share some of what I’ve learned. Most of what I have to say you’ve already heard, but it is worth repeating. This is not a rerun of an old homily, but a summery of truths about the Trinity that I have tried to weave into my homilies since last fall.

Remember what I said about the Divine Dance? The early Greek theologians used a word *perichoreasis* to describe the inner life of the Trinity that existed for all eternity. It was like a dance, God not being a dancer but the dance itself. Or, to use another image, one given us by St. John in his first letter, *“God is love.”* The nature of God, that reality which makes God to be God, is love. This self-giving Love, as revealed in Jesus, is the uncreated being that existed for all eternity, shared by the persons we call Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

With a big bang, that uncreated Love reached outside of itself and creation began, and with creation, time. That love that reached out from God is what we call grace. Grace is the love of God at work in creation. I

guess we could say that grace came into existence with the big bang! Everything came out of and expresses in some way the Trinity, the wonder of God. Creation, then, is not the making of something out of nothing, but the making of everything out of love. And since love is about the relationship of persons, all of creation is somehow about relationships. This is true if we look at the universe of galaxies, stars, planets and moons, or the world of atomic particles. What holds everything together is how they are related. Energy comes from the relationship between things. Split the atom, and you have another big bang, the bomb! The sacrament of matrimony exists in what goes on in the relationship of love between a husband and wife. As St. Bonaventure said, *“The Trinity leaves its imprint or stamp on everything, on all creation.”* (Trinity, p. 106)

Therefore, the Trinity is mirrored somehow in ecology, the environment, the balance of nature, the food chain and such. Creation is good, as it says in Genesis. Since it reflects something of the divine, it must be treated with care. What is very good in the creation story is that the man and the woman, unlike the rest of creation and the animal kingdom, are capable of entering into the Divine Dance. Human beings are able to enter into the flow of divine life. When Jesus said, *“I came that you may have life and have it in abundance,”* this is what he was talking about. When he said, *“May they be one, Father as you are in me and I am in you, may they be one in us,”* he was giving us our purpose in life; to live in a loving relationship with God and with all other human beings, even with creation.

From a Trinitarian perspective, sin, then, is what weakens the flow of divine love in our hearts, or stops it all together. Sin says, *“I refuse to enter the divine dance.”* Sin also stops the divine flow of love between us and others. This is why things like violence and sexual abuse are so horrible.

They destroy relationships and people even from the inside. They send the message that says, *“Life is not good. You are not good. I am no good. People are not to be trusted.”* Not only may people be scarred physically, but also emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. And bigotry says, *“You have no right to my love because you are black, an immigrant, gay, a Muslim or whatever.”* If a Christian lives in the life of the Trinity, those words would/could never cross his/her lips.

From a Trinitarian perspective, being saved doesn't mean Jesus paid the price for my ticket into heaven. This makes the Father look so vindictive, demanding suffering on Jesus' part to pay the debt we couldn't pay ourselves. Being saved means that God so loves us that he came after us and found a way for us to enter once again into the Divine Dance, the life of the Holy Trinity. Jesus suffered because love suffers. When love is rejected, resisted or lost, it suffers. If love meant he had to die on the cross, Jesus was willing to die on the cross. It isn't what he wanted, nor was it what his Father wanted. But if that is the price of loving, so be it. Jesus is Love incarnate. In him, God suffered.

A Trinitarian perspective gives us a wonderful insight in suffering. When we suffer because our love is rejected or resisted by those we love, we then have some sense of divine suffering. Suffering is not a test but evidence of our sharing in the very life of God. The value isn't in the suffering but in the loving. Living in the flow of God's eternal love is God's gift to us. We can't earn it and never will. Remember the book, **“Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?”** (The author never answered his question. He couldn't figure it out.) The reason that that question so bothers us is because it assumes we believe that good things happen to us as a reward for our goodness. *“I am good, therefore God loves me.”* When in

reality, “*God loves me because God is good.*” The sun and rain fall on the just and unjust at the same time. It’s all gift; everything. Did I earn you? Did you earn your spouse; your children; your talents? Don’t we even say so and so is “gifted?” Granted, you may have developed your gifts and used them well, but you didn’t earn them.

The Christian life, then, is not something we do. It is something we allow God to do through us. God loves us. We must surrender to God’s love. All we can do is receive that love. When a baby is born into the world, the very first thing it does is to draw into its lungs the gift of life. The second thing it does (and must do) is to let it out, usually as loudly as it can. That is the pattern of the Christian life. We draw in the gift of love from God and then let it out on others. We give it away to others. We even surrender it back to God. Unfortunately, we put conditions on our surrender to God. Living in the Spirit is not something we take in and hold for ourselves alone. We must breathe it out onto others or it will die in us, become sterile. Giving love away is what gives life.

From this perspective, what then is death? It is the moment of our final surrender to God. It is that moment when we give ourselves over to God without reservation, and enter completely into the eternal flow of the divine life/love of the Trinity. If we have lived our lives putting conditions on our love, we will probably not surrender completely to God when we die. And that will be our Purgatory.

By the way, that is what holiness is all about. Holiness is not about us. It’s not about following all the rules, knowing all the answers, or saying all the prayers. Holiness is about living in the breath of God within us. It is to live the way of love. And if we chose not to live the way of love, well, what difference would the Trinity make?