

Feast of the Holy Trinity

Dearly beloved, today we celebrate the feast of the Most Holy Trinity; it is true we gather each Sunday to worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but today we consider the mystery more profoundly. Today we leave aside the earthly deeds of Christ, and meditate upon the mystery of God as He has revealed Himself to us.

The postcommunion prayer for today's Mass is a fitting place to begin our contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity. As in every Mass, the priest prays for the whole congregation after Communion, asking for a particular grace for those who have received. At today's Mass he prays, "Lord our God, may the reception of this sacrament and the confession of the everlasting holy Trinity and undivided unity of the same profit us unto health of body and mind." This is a provocative prayer—we are surely familiar with the idea that Christ's Body and Blood can give us health of mind and body, but do we think of our belief in the Holy Trinity as also being life-giving? That the knowledge we have, though imperfect, of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit actually gives our minds and bodies vigor and strength?

Human beings are constituted to have contact with reality by way of our intellects, and the greater the reality we know, the more life it gives to our minds. When the mind is fed by the being and truth and goodness found in higher realities, the joy that the mind knows flows into the body; thus it is that martyrs, having intense experience of God, can be happy despite the suffering they experience in their bodies. Tied to this is that we are made to know the essences of things, what is at the heart of a thing or an issue or a question. Thus mind and body are rejuvenated by thinking about higher things, while they are wearied by details. The more we must tend to the material details of our life, the more tired we will become, for we are made for higher considerations. That is why one way of addressing our unhappiness is to focus on the things that will really make us happy, and then cut out all the unnecessary things that weary us.

The greatest thing a human being can know is God, the origin of all reality, the source of all truth. In times past, before the coming of Christ, men rejoiced to know something of God: that He exists, that He created the world, that He is eternal and unchangeable. In fact, it was the sign of the greatest cultures that their theology was the most advanced, and this was known in that the culture worshipped one God who was immaterial and the creator of all that is. We have the much greater privilege of God having revealed Himself to us: we know not only that He is one, but that He is also three—one in His divine substance, three in persons. This is not something we could have known unless God had revealed it to us, and thus it is a gift on His part, a sign of His love that we must cherish and cause to grow.

God's revelation of Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is analogous to a human person telling us about his heart. Many know the exterior actions and words of that person, but it is the person's choice to reveal his heart to you or to me. In the same way, that God is one can be known by all, and most of the world's religions acknowledge God's unity and uniqueness, but only one, the true religion, acknowledges and worships the three persons in that unity. The fact that we today believe in the divinity and equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is a tremendous gift of God. Jesus preached this truth two thousand years ago, revealing it to a few privileged souls at that time, but God continues to will that new souls should know it in each generation, and we have been chosen to be among those souls. All of this despite the damage done to the Church over the centuries and the current state of unbelief in the Church and in the world. God has revealed His inner life to humankind, and then He has chosen to reveal it to each one of us by willing that we should be given the gift of faith in the Trinity and have that faith nourished by prayer and the sacraments and by the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

So we should think long and hard today about what it is like to reveal our heart to another and get no response. We cannot react to God's self-revelation with apathy; doing so is an offense to God and it also hurts us, for we take lightly the truth that will make our minds and hearts happy for all eternity if we but put in the effort to contemplate what God has told us of Himself. When we fall in love or when a friendship grows, we find that each new thing we learn of the person we love causes us to desire to know more about the person, which in turn causes us to love more. But love never grows when we remain content with what we know and never pursue; the man must pursue the woman he loves and get her to tell him more of her heart if he ever hopes to be her husband; the friend must pursue the friend by conversation and letter and time spent together. So also we must pursue God—He has told us the most profound thing concerning Himself: that He is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and now it is our duty to ask Him to tell us more, to strive to know Him more deeply so that we may love Him more perfectly.

Now you might say to me, that is all good and well, but it is impractical. How can I contemplate the Trinity? It is too abstract for me. Let me give one example. The best philosophers in the ancient world knew that there was one God and not many gods. This was also the truth emphasized by Moses and those who were faithful Jews. In the coming of Christ, God has now revealed Himself to us as three persons, three persons who are distinguished by their relation to one another. Thus not only is unity and simplicity the basis and source of all reality, but so is relationship. It is an amazing thing to learn that at the heart of God is the everlasting union of three persons. Since we are made in God's image, it shows us that we are made to be in relation to others in a lasting way, and when we are not, we suffer because we are not imaging God as we were made to do. This first means that the highest type of relationship we can have is of a spiritual nature, for the relationships in God are based upon His intellect and will. Thus friendships are most perfect when they are founded in union of mind and heart rather than upon physical attraction or pleasure. This also means that being in relation to others as God is in relation is open to every human being, even if marriage is not possible. Spiritual friendship, based upon love of God and the good things He has made, is friendship which is most like God, and therefore gives us the most happiness.

Added to this is that the lifelong commitments of marriage and religious vows image the eternal unity of the three persons; while we choose to make the commitment at a point in time, nevertheless we agree to honor our vows for the entirety of this life and that makes it have a quasi-eternal quality. A culture scared of commitment, unwilling to make vows or honor them, is not acting in the image of God; it is isolating itself from the very thing that would make it more divine. This also means that we have a duty of charity to those who are alone in this life, especially if we have been blessed with a happy marriage or good, life-giving friendships, for it is not good that man be alone, and this is in a way because it is not good that God be alone. If God is in relationship for all eternity and we are made in His image, we should reach out to those who are isolated by no desire of their own, those who struggle to be accepted, those whose lives did not go the way they had planned or hoped. Community is the eternal reality of God; we are made in His image, and thus charity should impel us to know and love those who are alone in this world. By all of this you can see that a brief meditation on the eternal relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can yield much fruit for thought and for action.

Therefore on this Trinity Sunday, may we carefully consider in our hearts how we can be more attentive to God's revelation of Himself to us, and how that contemplation can become a regular part of our lives. Let us above all be thankful today that God has revealed Himself to us. We no longer have to struggle and fumble to know something about God as have so many generations of mankind before us. Let us thank the Spirit for having been our unseen Teacher for so many years, the gentle companion of our lives, the Consoler in our times of sorrow. Let us thank the Son for having taking upon Himself a human nature, for having died upon the Cross, and for showing us the way back to Our Father in heaven. And let us thank the Father for having sent the Son and the Spirit, for having sought us when we were lost, and for not letting us perish despite our sins.

I close with the prayer of St. Augustine upon finishing his work on the Trinity: “O Lord our God, we believe in Thee, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For the Truth would not say, Go, baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, unless Thou were a Trinity. . . . O Lord my God, my one hope, hearken to me, lest through weariness I be unwilling to seek Thee, but that I may always ardently seek Thy face. Give me strength to seek, who has made me find Thee, and has given the hope of finding Thee more and more. My strength and my weakness are in Thy sight: preserve the one, and heal the other. My knowledge and my ignorance are in Thy sight; where Thou have opened to me, receive me as I enter; where Thou have closed, open to me as I knock. May I remember Thee, understand Thee, love Thee. Increase these things in me, until Thou renew me wholly in the life to come. Amen.”