

Trinity Sunday

“[Our] faith is this: we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity ... For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy [Spirit].”¹

In the name of the one God in Trinity of Persons. Amen.

Good morning. Welcome on this Trinity Sunday. Did you know that this Sunday has many names? “The Preacher’s Nightmare”² – because how can one explain a mystery? “Heresy Sunday” – because many theologians, seeking to expound upon the Trinity, have either said too much or not enough and been labelled heretics.

Last week, I shared with Fr. Roper that I’d finally failed to dodge the Trinity Sunday bullet and asked for his prayers. He did even better: he gave me a sermon!

“And now,” he said, “a few words on the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.”

What do you think? Can I sit down yet? A bit too short, right? I know. So, off I went to read and reflect.

I re-watched a bit from LutheranSatire called “St. Patrick’s Bad Analogies” which – in three and a half minutes – explains several heretical understandings of the Trinity and their failings. Watch it later: it’s wicked funny.³

I found a helpful article from Ben Myers of the Millis Institute in Brisbane, Australia entitled “Tweeting the Trinity: Because Heresy is Meh.”⁴ Of his 66 (!) suggestions for avoiding heresy, the first is my favorite: “begin by abolishing Trinity Sunday.”

These offerings – while entertaining – miss the point that “every Sunday is Trinity Sunday.”⁵ Every Sunday our worship begins: “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Every Sunday,

¹ The Creed of St. Athanasius can be read in full in the *Book of Common Prayer*, page 864-865.

² Bishop Robert Barron “on the Meaning of the Trinity” viewed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5l-Ly9tGQwI> on May 25, 2018.

³ Lutheran Satire, “St. Patrick’s Bad Analogies”, accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQLfgaUoQCw> on May 20, 2018.

⁴ Accessed online at <http://www.faith-theology.com/2017/06/tweeting-trinity-because-heresy-is-meh.html> on May 25, 2018.

we read from Scripture – the overarching witness of which tells us our creator **longs** to be known by us. Holy Scripture is God’s self-revelation to us. So on this Trinity Sunday, let’s look closely at our one God in three Persons. Here we go!

There’s a saying: “a picture’s worth ...” [“a thousand words”].

It’s true, isn’t it? “A complex idea can be conveyed with ... a single ... image.” Put differently, “an image of a subject conveys its meaning or essence more effectively than a description does.”⁶

Creation – all that is, seen and unseen – is communication. Bishop Robert Barron⁷ observes that everything we can observe communicates – creation is a “complex web of things which are making and leaving images of themselves.”⁸ Have you ever picked up a seashell on the beach and seen the image of that shell imprinted in the sand? The shell communicated its image to the sand. Ever planted a seed and, after a few days of sunlight and water, found an incredible image of the original plant growing in your garden? The plant communicated its image through the seed.

Humans communicate in similar ways and also in vastly more advanced ways. I’ve communicated myself through my children – who are, to varying degrees – images of me and their father. We also communicate in higher ways, through speech, writing, video, and art. In each case, we create an image in our minds and project that image outward.

Communication is everywhere. At a microscopic level, communication happens within cells, atoms, and between quarks (that’s the extent of my understanding of quarks, by the way). At a universal level, communication takes place between galaxies, planets, suns, and moons. Creation – all

⁵ Barron, see above.

⁶ Wiki, “A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words”, accessed online at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_picture_is_worth_a_thousand_words on May 25, 2019.

⁷ Robert Barron, see above.

⁸ In the following discussion, I am heavily indebted to Barron, whose explanation of the mystery of our one God in trinity of persons has been an integral part of my formation.

that is, seen and unseen – is characterized by communication. Everything that is ... all that God created ... communicates itself – shares its image – with everything else that is.

“It should hardly surprise us, then, that within the very nature of God, something like communication – image making – is involved.”⁹

Return with me to that idiom: a picture’s worth a thousand words. If I want to communicate with myself – to know what I look like – I could make a picture by standing before a mirror. My image in a mirror *looks* exactly like me, but it isn’t me. It doesn’t think. It can’t love. As Barron puts it, “It’s just an image of my physical surface.” It’s not a perfect image of who I am.

God, however, being God, can make (the Church’s word for this is “beget”) a perfect image of who God is – and God doesn’t need a mirror. God has done just this from all eternity, God has begotten a perfect image of God’s mind, will, heart, and love. This eternally begotten image of God is the second Person of the Trinity – God the Son. To say “We believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God,” is to acknowledge that Jesus is a perfect image of God – is fully God. Jesus communicates God so perfectly, he is known as the “Word of God.” “And”, as John tells us at the outset of his Gospel, “the Word became flesh and lived among us.” So the begetter of this perfect image is “God the Father”; the perfect image is “God the Son.”

We’ll talk about the Spirit in a moment, but first let me say something about the gendered language we use for God. When the Church speaks of “God the Father” and “God the Son”, it’s easy for us to come away with the impression that God is male.¹⁰ Yet in the first chapter of Genesis, God says, “Let us” – notice the Trinity speaking in creation – “let us make humankind in our image.” And what happens? God creates humankind ... male **and** female. If humankind bears God’s image and is comprised on both male and female, then God is not male or female. The image

⁹ Barron again.

¹⁰ Such an impression is unhelpful. As Mary Daly has observed, “When God is male, the male is god.”

of God is most fully revealed in male **and** female. Which begs the question: if by “God the Father” we don’t mean a male god, why do we use such language? I’ve got a couple of thoughts for you on this which will be both helpful and not fully satisfactory.

- First, naming God as Father says that God – in creating us – is something like our parent.
- Second, and more important to me, using anthropomorphic words to describe God (calling God Father) acknowledges God is personal – is a being with whom we can enter into relationship.

Of course, on a practical level, when the perfect image of God (the second Person of the Trinity) took on human flesh in order to better communicate God to us, this necessarily involved taking on a gender. I do not dispute that Jesus was male.

So far so good? We’ve got God: Father and Son, though not male in a human sense. Let’s talk about the Holy Spirit.

St. Augustine helps us here: the Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son contemplate one another and each sees a perfect image of “beauty, goodness, and truth.”¹¹ This leads them “naturally, necessarily, automatically [to] fall in love.” Their love is purer and deeper than its shadow which we experience here on earth. Archbishop Fulton Sheen (who you may remember as the host of NBC’s *The Catholic Hour*) describes this love as “so powerful, so strong, and so perfect, that it forms between them a living bond ... [which expresses itself not in speech or cries, but] in a ... [sigh] or a breath. This love-sigh is so powerful that it exists as the third Person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit.”¹²

¹¹ Barron again.

¹² Fulton J. Sheen, “The Divine Romance: The Blessed Trinity”, accessed online at http://www.malankaraworld.com/library/Faith/Trinity/Trinity_divine-romance-blessed-trinity-sheen-part-3.htm on May 26, 2018.

There you have it. God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all inextricably bound in perfect communication of love. And this love is active, continually moving outward from God toward creation, inviting us to participate – offering love to us and calling forth our love in return. To be made in the image of God is to be made by and for love. As Barron beautifully summarizes, “We are meant to find our deepest identity precisely in God.” [Repeat slowly.] God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah had one goal: that *all* nations of the earth would be blessed – would know God’s love – would find their identity in God. The law, the prophets, the wisdom writings are best understood as a pouring forth of God’s love for our benefit – that through us all nations would be blessed – would find their identity in God. When that didn’t work, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” As we heard Jesus say this morning, “God did not send the Son ... to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

The Good News for us today is this invitation to love – to find our identity in God’s eternal, communicating love. We accept the invitation in our baptism, wherein God pours love into us and we receive the Holy Spirit. God nourishes the Spirit within us each week at the Eucharist through the “spiritual food of the most precious body and blood.” That Spirit, crying “Abba Father” from within us, refines us – transforms us – oh ... here’s a good word for us – **transfigures** us – and we become, over time, Christ-ians. Little Christs. Fellow bearers of the image – the love – of God.

Brothers and sisters, on this Trinity Sunday and on every Sunday, we are here to worship God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, to behold and adore the perfect communication of eternal love within God and from God to the whole world, to find ourselves there, and then to bear that love – that image – everywhere we go.

Let all God’s people say Amen.