

## [Spirituality](#)



by Thomas Gumbleton

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I remember from early in grade school learning catechism and learning the definition of God: God is three persons in one God. Probably all of you (at least many of you) remember learning the same catechism and learning that definition of God. I always thought (and maybe you did too) that this definition of God came out of the Scriptures and was taught from the very beginning of the church, but it wasn't.

It took until the fourth century before this doctrine of the Holy Trinity was defined as a doctrine of the church. In the Scriptures there's no such definition in the Old Testament or the New Testament. What we do find is what we hear today in our Scripture lessons. We hear about how God works in our world. It's a God who loves and who is love.

### **The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity**

[May 27, 2018](#)

Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40

Psalms 33

Romans 8:14-17

Matthew 28:16-20

In that first lesson from the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses is preaching to the people and he shares with them his sense of amazement when he says to them, "Never has there been a God who went out to look for a people and take them out from among the other nations by the strength of trials and signs ... and with a firm hand and outstretched arm. ... Ask of the times past. Inquire from the day when God created human beings on earth. Ask from one end of the world to the other: Has there ever been anything as extraordinary as this? Has anything like this been heard of before? Has there ever been a people who remained alive after hearing as you did the voice of the living God from the midst of fire?"

Moses is reminding them of their experience of God's love. Of all the nations in the world, God loved them, chose them to be God's special people, and guided them through their history in preparation for the coming of Jesus. Moses further on describes how God accompanied them on that long journey from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land and helped them to establish themselves as a people. They were experiencing God's love, coming to know something about God.

In our second lesson, St. Paul, writing to the Church of Rome, "All those who live in the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God." You remember Paul was one who had persecuted the chosen people. He had that extraordinary experience of being converted as he was walking on the way to Damascus to arrest Christians, to put them on trial to execute them, when he was knocked to the ground and heard that voice, "Why are you persecuting me?" Paul says, "Who am I persecuting?" "I am Jesus whom you persecute."

Paul got up from the ground and found his way back to Jerusalem to meet with the other first Christians to become part of that community. Paul had that profound experience of God choosing him in such a very special way, God showing again, God's love, undeserved, unasked for, but there — God's love. That's a constant story of God in the Scriptures: A God of love who reaches out to draw all of us to God's self, to enable us to live with the very life of God.

This action of God in the world is what leads us to understand something about the nature of God that could lead us in a way to some, at least remote understanding of

God as eternity. You remember in the First Letter of John, in Chapter 4, where John says, "God is love. Where there is love there is God," and then to emphasize it he says, "And this is the love I mean: Not that we loved God because God has loved us, no, God first loved us."

We don't earn the love of God. God first loved us, drew us into being because God loved us, sustains us in every moment of our lives. We wouldn't exist if it weren't for the ever-constant love of God. For me, each one of us, every person in this universe, on this planet — all of the universe is in existence only because God loved it into being. Because God is love we get a sense when someone loves, there is a beloved, the bond between the two of them: Father, Son, Spirit.

So, in some dim way, understanding God is love, we begin to see that God is a community of persons where love is the binding force, where love is the very source of the being of God. Of course when God calls us into existence, God calls us to live according to God's ways. God sent Jesus, the Son of God, the "Word of God" as John calls him in the beginning of the Gospel. Jesus comes into our human family to be the visible image of the invisible God, the unknowable God. Every action in the life of Jesus is an expression of love.

If we really study the Scriptures, the Gospels, and study the life of Jesus, become aware of who he is, what he did, and what he said, we begin to understand more deeply that God is love. On this Feast of the Holy Trinity we can never expect to intellectually grasp how God can be three and yet only one. It's beyond our capability to understand; God is mystery. But when we begin to reflect on what God does and how God acts, we come to know in a vague way who God is. Of course then, like Paul, we experience God's loving me, or we can experience it if we take the time to reflect: I wouldn't be here if God didn't love me.

Sometimes people have an extraordinary sense of that — how we are only here because God loves us. I had that experience one time when I was driving on the Lodge Freeway. I didn't know it, but at the time I was suffering from vertigo. Suddenly I had a sense of spinning. I'm on the freeway going 60 miles an hour and all of a sudden my steering wheel feels like it's out of control, but it's because I'm out of control.

I'm in the lane by the middle. I cross three lanes and go up a hill. Near the top, the car turns over and I roll back down. How I ever managed not to hit any other car and

how I happened to be at a place in the freeway where there was a hill -- you know that freeway; it's mostly solid concrete.

The next morning I remember a beautiful day and I'm walking across the street in downtown Detroit, and everything seemed so beautiful. All of a sudden I realize that this is all a gift. I never had such a profound sense of my life being a gift as I did that morning, and I've never forgotten that. I really understand: God loves me and God keeps me in existence. Even after I die God will love me, keep me in existence forever, and that's true of every one of us. Somehow we need to try to get that experience of how we are so dependent for our very existence upon the love of God.

One of the commentaries I read about these Scriptures of today shows what it means not only for each of us as individuals to experience and to live and respond to the love of God, but as a community. I think this is especially true of this community. Fr. John Donahue was a commentator on these Scriptures and he said, talking about the Gospel, where Jesus gives us the commission: "Heard against this biblical background, the grand commission of the risen Jesus at the end of Matthew's Gospel is not merely a mandate to perform the baptismal ritual."

Probably that's what most of us thought of as we heard those words, "baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," so we think of baptism. But Fr. Donahue says, "It's not merely a mandate to perform the baptismal ritual with the three divine names. It's also a commission to form communities out of individuals who respond to the love of God revealed in Jesus by living the life of the Spirit taught in the Sermon on the Mount, a very concrete life of honesty, justice, act of love, reconciliation." The Sermon on the Mount — a community responding and living that way.

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Once we understand how much God loves us and we want to respond to that love, we begin to live as Jesus calls us to. You have formed such a community in this parish. I've experienced for a number of years now and I'm always in deep admiration of what you do. I encourage you to keep doing it. Don't let anybody close this parish — that's my bottom line — because you are a community who has listened to God's Word, responded to it, and have continued to make the presence of God felt, not just in your life, but also in the community around us, and the

community of this world.

The doctrine of the Trinity as a doctrine began to be taught in the fourth century. We live it now very clearly and openly, and profess it as a mystery of our faith. I hope that you'll continue to reflect on these Scriptures of today and continue to respond to that God who first loved us.

[Homily given May 27, 2018 at St. Philomena in Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]