Opinion
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Abigail Keenan)



by Thomas Gumbleton

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

June 20, 2019

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Soundcloud

The feast day that we celebrate this morning is quite unusual among all the feast days that we have throughout the church year. It's the only feast that celebrates a doctrine, a teaching of the church. As you recall, most of the feasts are about people, saints, sometimes, but often about Jesus or Mary or the other disciples. We celebrate events in the life of Jesus. But today we celebrate a doctrine, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

June 16, 2019

Proverbs 8:22-31

Psalm 8

Romans 5:1-5

John 16: 12-15

It's an example of what Jesus meant when he said at the last supper, "I will continue to teach you even after I'm gone." In fact in this case, in the church, it was not clear for over 300 years. But the doctrine of the Trinity really spoke to us. It was in the Council of Nicaea in the year 325 that the church defined this doctrine: one God in three persons. It's a doctrine that is what we call a mystery because in truth, with our human minds, we cannot grasp it.

One God — that was the constant teaching of the Hebrew people. It was the belief of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus. One God — I am God; there is no other God beside me. Now we find God is three somehow. We can never really, as I said, understand this, so there's no point in trying to think that somehow we'll solve the mystery; it's impossible. But if we follow the way of the disciples as they gradually came to know Jesus as God, they also knew God as God of the chosen people.

As we celebrated last Sunday, they experienced that Spirit of God coming upon them, changing them, driving them out into the world to witness to the truth of

Jesus. The way we relate to this profound mystery of the Trinity is by remembering the truth of God that the apostle John proclaims in the first letter he wrote to the community: "God is love. Where there is love, there is God. This is the love I mean: not that we loved God, but that God first loved us." God is love. Where there is love, there is God.

Of course when you think about love and God as a community of love, you begin to have a glimpse, at least, how there is a lover, a beloved, and the bond that joins them. That's God — love. We're called to enter into that mystery because we're made in the image of God, so we're called to be people who love. The only way we grow into our fullness as a human person is by loving, loving one another.

Today we celebrate in the United States a special holiday, celebrating how fathers love their children, cherish them, guide them, lead them, form them — all out of love. That's the Trinity at work. We're called to be people of love. Even though it may seem to be somewhat disturbing, I think it's important to think about how we destroy that image of love — not just the image, I shouldn't say, but the reality of love when we turn against people, especially the worst kind of evil, the evil of war.

I don't know if you noticed a couple weeks ago when we were celebrating the extraordinary military event of the invasion of Europe back in 1944. There were articles over and over again about the few remaining veterans who had been part of that. If you read some of those articles, perhaps you did notice that most of them had never spoken about their experiences, what they had really gone through, what it meant to kill.

There's a description by Sen. John McCain. I'm sure most of us remember him. He died quite recently, a military hero. He wrote about himself. He said, "I hated my enemies even before they held me captive because hate sustained me in my devotion to their complete destruction and helped me overcome the virtuous human impulse to recoil in disgust from what had to be done by my hand." How evil to learn to hate in order to kill.

But John McCain says (and I'm sure it's true of most military people, they're loving people) they have to hate in order to kill otherwise they could never do it. They had to think of the other person as a monster, an evil person, someone who has to be disposed of, got rid of. That's hatred, and it's a total opposite of what we're called to be when we're made in the image of God. Right now if you're following events going

on in our world, we're building up to a confrontation with Iran.

Leaders in our government are challenging the president to lay down a mark, that if they go past this, we'll go to war. How evil and wrong. They need to find other ways to resolve our problems. Pope John Paul, in speaking about war, repeated a cry of Pope Paul VI, actually, "War never again, no, never again war." Why? Because he says it destroys the lives of innocent people, throws into upheaval the lives of those who do the killing, and always leaves behind a trail of hatred and resentment that makes it all the more difficult to resolve the very problems we try to deal with.

That second part, especially — throws into upheaval the lives of those who do the killing. Again, if you follow the news, you discover suicides have gone up in our country to a large extent. That military persons die by suicide four times as much as the rest of us because once you learn to hate and to kill, you're destroying yourself from within. So this mystery of the Trinity that we celebrate is very important because again, it teaches us about a God who is love.

Advertisement

St. John put it in the beginning of his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God and the Word became flesh, Jesus," again, the Trinity — God, the Word, the bond, the Spirit. A community of love — that's who our God is — Father, Son, Holy Spirit. We enter into that community of love through our baptism. As we live our lives, we must continue to build within ourselves a fuller image of God who is love, and within our families try to be gentle, understanding, loving in a deep way with one another, within our neighborhoods, within our city, within our country, throughout the world.

It's the same message: We must bring this love of God that we enter into when we become a disciple of Jesus. We must bring it into the world around us. God is love. Where there is love, there is God. Each of us has the call to bring that love which we share now into the world around us. Today we pray that we may grow in love, become ever more faithful images of our God who is love — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Editor's note: *This homily was given June 16 at St. Ambrose Church, Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan. 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.