

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Thomas Gumbleton | Jun. 11, 2009 The Peace Pulpit

We're so very familiar with the sign of the cross, which we say at the beginning of this liturgy, for example, and most of the time before any of our prayers or devotion, "In the name of the Father and of the son and of the holy spirit," we are very familiar. But we probably do not reflect often enough on the fact that that formula, which we take in a sense, I think, very much for granted, was not how the first disciples in the beginning experienced God and reflected on God. It's a formula that, in fact, only was developed within the Church about 200 years after the last biblical writings were proclaimed.

Today's Readings
Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40
Psalm 33:4-5, 6, 9, 18, 19, 20, 22
Romans 8:14-17
Matthew 28:16-20

It came to us from the first of the general councils in the Church -- the Council of Nicaea -- the council from which we get the creed that we recite during our liturgy, and it's a formula that attempts to explain God in some sense for us, a task that obviously, is impossible. But it was an attempt to help us to see into the very being of God in some way, to know God in God's own depth and God's own reality, but we can only use images; we can't truly understand God, ever come close to it.

I think sometimes what we call the mystery of the trinity, because it's sort of an abstraction, "the trinity," doesn't really touch us very deeply in our spirit life. In fact, the philosophers and theologians who tried to put forth the meaning of God in three persons, one God in three persons, spoke about things such as one nature, what they called two processions, three persons, four relations. These are philosophical terms that were used to try to help us to get some grasp of the mystery of the trinity, or the mystery of God, but it's really impossible.

In fact, Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest theologians in the Church, and one who wrote prolifically on theological issues, there's a story that at the end of his life, after he had written with all the skill that he had and the depth of insight that he had about God, he had an experience of God, something that touched him in the very depths of his being. After that, Thomas wanted to burn everything he wrote, because he said it doesn't even come close to explaining who God is, what God is, how God interacts with us. It's the experience of God.

That's what we derived from our scriptures today. We're not urged to try to get a deeper intellectual grasp of God, but rather as Moses instructs the people, think about what God has done for you. 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? Never has there been a God who went out to look for a people. God came looking for them -- that's what they had experienced -- and to take them out from among the other nations, by the strength of trials and signs, by wonders.

With a firm hand and an outstretched arm, Moses was urging them, "Remember what God has done for you. Think of all the ways in which God has blessed you, has drawn you out of slavery in Egypt to become God's own people. Think about that -- how God has interacted with you, and then you begin to experience God as a

God of love. Never has there been any deed as tremendous as those done for you by God, which you saw with your own eyes. Therefore, be convinced that God is the only God of heaven and earth, and that there is no other.?

So Moses is urging the people, ?Look into your experience, find the ways in which God has acted within your life, and then you will come to know that God is a God of love.? The same thing is true when we turn to St. Paul. Paul and the other disciples and early Christians ... not Paul precisely; Paul did not know Jesus in human flesh, but the other disciples did and Paul had that intimate experience of Jesus when Paul was going to persecute the Christians and Jesus confronted him in a mysterious vision.

But Paul urges those first disciples and the early Christians to remember that those who walk in the spirit of God are sons and daughters of God: ?You did not receive a spirit of slavery, but the spirit that makes you adopted sons and daughters. The spirit assures our spirit that we are children of God.? So Paul too, like Moses, is urging us, try to understand how God interacts with you. God is as a loving father or a loving mother, because that?s an image that comes to us out of the scriptures also, the book of the prophet Isaiah. So we become sons and daughters of God. That?s how we interact with God.

We don?t need to know all the precision of the theological mystery of the trinity as theologians have tried to set it forth in human terms. It can?t be expressed, and even as we try to think about a God who is one nature, but three persons and two processions in four relations, that means nothing to us, probably for most of us, anyway, but when we think about a God who is a God ready to free us from the slavery of sin, just as God freed the chosen people from the slavery of Egypt, or when we think about a God who sends God?s own son into the world to share God?s very life with us so that we become sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of the Son of God.

When we think about that kind of a God, then we will be ready to do what Jesus tells his disciples at the very end of the gospel. ?Go out into the world, proclaim the good news, tell everyone that our God is a God of love who is ready to transform our world into God?s reign, where everyone will have the benefit of that love of God.? I think, in a way, that may surprise some people to suggest it, we can be very grateful for what happened this week, what was done by President Obama in Egypt.

?Proclaim the good news,? Jesus told his disciples. President Obama can?t do that as a minister of the gospel, but what he spoke in Egypt was really the good news of Jesus, trying to bring peace between Muslims and Christians. Break down the barriers that lead to violence and lead to war, lead to killing. Show respect, listen to one another, dialogue with one another, interact with one another in loving ways, not as enemies. We don?t know what response will happen, but certainly, I think, as people of this country, we can take pride in the fact, and even more, be grateful, that our President was proclaiming good news, a message of reconciliation and respect and love.

That?s what Jesus asked all of us to do, and if we, each of us, try to act in the same way within our own community, well, we now have a mix of people of different races, obviously of many different religious backgrounds, many Muslims in our midst; if we, each of us, can follow the example of President Obama, which is really what Jesus asked us to do, ?Go and proclaim the good news, the message of God?s love, the message of reconciliation,? that will finally bring peace into our world.

So this day, when we celebrate the mystery of the trinity, I hope we will try to make it a day when we remember and nurture our own deep experience with God and God?s love for us, but also a day for which we will commit ourselves to go forth and proclaim that good news of God?s love for us and for every person on this planet. And as we proclaim that good news, we will carry on the work of Jesus, the work of bringing God?s life and God?s love into every part of our world and to every person on our planet.

[This homily was preached at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mi.]

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