

Published on National Catholic Reporter (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

May 31, 2013 at 9:29am

# We must be open to the spirit and love of God

by Thomas Gumbleton

The Peace Pulpit

I'm sure all of us have noticed over the past few weeks now how many times Pope Francis comes into the news because of the kind of unusual things that he's begun to do, the way he's carried out his understanding of the role of what it means to be the bishop of Rome. One of the things that he did quite recently that I find very instructive, especially as we reflect on the Trinity today: He was at St. Peter's Square and, of course, as is so often, there were tens of thousands of people there and at one point, they all began to cry out in unison, "Francesco! Francesco! Viva Francesco!"

They were just celebrating this new pope, and he began to quiet down, saying, "No, wait a minute! Yes, that's good -- I like to be recognized and praised, but it's not Francesco. It's Jesus! You should be saying Gesu! Gesu! Gesu!" So he began to lead the crowd in that cry: "Viva Gesu!" That's the one, not Francesco, not any other pope, bishop, anyone: Jesus is the one that we should be acclaiming and rejoicing in and glorify.

Because more than anything else, the blessing of Jesus coming into our human history is becoming one of us, a human, one like us in every way except sin. The main thing is that Jesus began to do up for us who God is. We are beginning to get the fullness of revelation about God. The coming of the Messiah brought something very new, because if you remember the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, the Jewish people, throughout all of their history, would never even name God. They wouldn't say the name of God because God was so above, beyond anything they could comprehend.

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity  
Proverbs 8:22-31  
Psalms 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9  
Romans 5:1-5  
John 1:1-18  
The coming of the Messiah

In all of archeology, archeological discoveries and so on, no one has ever found an image of God created by Jews. In the Middle East, there are all kinds of different images of all kinds of different gods, but the Jewish God, Yahweh, [is] never imaged because for them, God was ultimately holy -- beyond us. In fact, the word for "holy" in Hebrew is *kadosh*, which means "other" -- totally other.

So you can't image God because as soon as you begin to do that, you have to begin to put God in some kind of framework -- how tall is God; what color is God; what gender is God -- and once you begin to do that, you're diminishing God because you're making God like us instead of God being totally other -- beyond us. That was the Jewish understanding of God, and so they had (which is good and you need to draw from this) a profound sense of awe about God. Remember when Moses was approaching the burning bush, God said, "Wait! Take off your shoes, your sandals. This is holy ground," and so you have to be very respectful. God is holy; God is beyond us; God is other.

Now Jesus comes, and for the first time, we begin to get a clearer revelation of who God really is. There's a part of the letter, the first letter of St. John, that says, "No one has ever seen God." Right? No one has ever seen God, "but, where there is love, there is God." Where there is love, there is God, and Jesus began to show this to us by the way he acted most of all: going out among the poorest, the most vulnerable, healing people, lifting people's spirits, helping people to be whole, to become happy, joyful, full of life. This is Jesus, and he's bringing love into our world, into our human history, and this is God doing this.

Then Jesus continues to reveal God to us just by who he is and how he acts, but then he tells us, as we hear in the Gospel lesson this morning, "I can't tell you everything, but after I'm gone" (and he doesn't add this, but he understands it) "and I'm raised from the dead, I come back transformed and filled with God's spirit." Then the spirit of God will continue to enlighten you, to reveal who God is to you if you're open to hearing that spirit, and this will go on and on until we all have a deeper awareness of who God is.

We begin to understand: God isn't singular, individualistic; no. God is community, God is love. You can't have love unless you're loving someone. There has to be the lover and the beloved, and so God is love; there's got to be a community, and the community is bound together by the spirit. That's not a very profound explanation, but at least it helps us begin to get a sense of why we celebrate God as Trinity, not just with one God, but God is a God of love. The lover, the beloved and the spirit who brings them together -- that's what we understand by our Trinity, the doctrine of the Trinity.

It took over 300 years for the church to come to understand this in any way -- even to get a deep sense of how God is, yes, one God, but also three persons in one God, a community of love. It didn't happen -- our understanding of it expressed in those kinds of terms -- until the first council of the church, the Council of Nicaea in 325. That's where the spirit is Jesus' promise, reached ... through those gathered in that council and helped them to put into words something of this mystery of who God is -- the God who is love.

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One of the extraordinary things about that council that I think might be worth noting is the pope wasn't even there. It's the church through whom God speaks; the Holy Spirit comes to all of us -- to the whole church -- and makes us alive with the presence of God and helps us to bring that presence of God into our world. Not just the pope or the bishops: the whole community, and that's what happened there at the Council of Nicaea. We were able to understand because of the Holy Spirit guiding us, as church, how God is a community of love.

Now what we need to do, I think, is to remember those words of St. Paul in our second lesson today: "The love of God is poured into our hearts to the Holy Spirit who's given to us." The love of God -- God who is love -- that love is poured into our hearts, into our spirit to the Holy Spirit who's given to us. If we are open to that, what will happen? Well obviously, as people begin to go out into our world, we'll spread love and peace and joy and goodness wherever we go.

That's why Jesus came, to bring God's love very intimately into the life of each one of us so that then we can go into our world, transform that world through the power of love. The Holy Spirit poured into our hearts is the love of God given to us to be shared with all others to make our world a better place because it's a world filled with love.

[Homily given at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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