

Trinity Sunday, A – June 11, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 8:30 and 11:00am Sunday Masses – 1,050 words

The Most Holy Trinity is not only the central mystery of our faith but also an inexhaustible mystery:¹ unaided human reason cannot arrive at the knowledge of the Triune God, and even after we have arrived at that knowledge by the light of faith, we can never fully comprehend him either. Nevertheless, it is important that we regularly contemplate this mystery – not just on Trinity Sunday but always – for we are made in the image and likeness of the God and so are made to reflect the mystery of the Holy Trinity in our own lives. Today’s second reading from St. Paul gives us a particular consideration in this regard.

Our patron saint begins by talking about the relationships that we should have with others: “Mend your ways”, he says; “encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.” Perhaps the “holy kiss” part makes some of us, depending upon our cultural background, a little uneasy; in any case, we understand well what Paul is instructing here: live in unity and harmony, in truth and charity. And because we so often fail to live up to this standard, he exhorts us: “mend your ways”; be reconciled to one another. How challenging this can be!

But notice that St. Paul gives an assurance: if we do try to live this way, then God will be with us. And he concludes by saying, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” In other words, living rightly with each other is connected with our living rightly with God. We cannot long do one without the other. And this is consistent with what the Lord himself taught in the gospel:² there cannot be a true love of God without also a love of neighbor.³ This touches upon many areas of our lives, from the way we treat our family to the way we treat the poor.

Our reflection deepens, then, when we contemplate that inner-life of the Trinity that we were made to reflect. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons but one eternal God. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; but the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. There is unity and diversity within the Most Holy Trinity, as our opening prayer reminded us in this Mass. But there is no imperfection; there is no in-fighting, so to speak! The Father loves the Son completely and totally, such that he gives himself entirely to him. The Son reciprocates this love. Because there is this mutual, total self-gift, we recognize a third Person, the Holy Spirit, who is the love given and received. All three persons are co-eternal; they always were and always will be.

Our participation in this great mystery is precisely through grace. It is by grace that we are saved;⁴ it is by grace that the very life of God is poured into our souls. If we are in the state of sanctifying grace, then we are participating in the mystery of the Holy Trinity – always imperfectly, but it is a true participation, nonetheless. We receive the life of God for the first time at Baptism, and that life is restored to us, after it has been lost due to mortal sin, through the Sacrament of Confession. Both Baptism and Confession reconcile us to God! How difficult it can be to remain always in a “state of reconciliation” with others, though. Through lack of charity, misunderstanding, and even malice, we are not always right with those around us.

And sometimes we hold onto that. We do not want things to be set right. Perhaps it is through pride: “it’s their fault, not mine, I’m not budging”, we might think. Maybe it is through

¹ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 234 ff.

² Cf., for example, Matthew 5:46-48.

³ Cf., for example, Mark 12:30-31.

⁴ Cf. Ephesians 2:8.

misunderstanding and mistaken judgment: we attribute some motive to another that is not the case at all. In all such situations and more, we must think about the Lord Jesus, who fully reveals the Trinity to us. He set aside the glory of heaven to come down to this earth, enter into our misery, and save us from it; can I not lower myself in humility and at least try to reconcile with this other person? Christ took the first step, coming to us while we were yet sinners; can I not stop waiting for the other person to take the first step, and instead do so myself, in order to mend the relationship?

Damaged relationships can surely be very complex, even spanning generations, and I do not at all intend to over-simplify that. But in every one of these situations we must think about the greeting of St. Paul, which begins with, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...”, and then having the crucifix before our mind’s eye, meditate upon what the Lord Jesus did to reconcile us to the Triune God, though we in no way deserved it. Doing so will convict us that we can never give up on anyone; that we must at least pray; we must reach out; we must humble ourselves; again, we must not give up. He has not given up on us!

Think of the first reading, as Moses almost bargains with the Lord: “O Lord, do come along in our company”, he says; “this is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins”! How stiff-necked we – and others – can be! Yet God, who has “so loved the world that he gave his only Son”, wills to share his life with us and accompany us on our journey. The question for us this week is, “Am I living in a state of grace, such that the life of the Holy Trinity is active in my own soul?” We cannot give what we do not have. We cannot long be right with others if we are not right with God. And God designed us to seek out and live this “rightness” always.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.