

Trinity Sunday (Cycle A)

(Exod 34:4b-6,8-9; 2 Cor 13:11-13; John 3:16-18)

We all know what the creed is: it's a proclamation of our Catholic faith. However, the creed comes in various shapes and sizes. We all know the simplest form, the Apostles Creed, which we learned by heart along with the Our Father and the Hail Mary. Any of you, if I called on you could recite it, couldn't you? Then there is the Nicene Creed, which we recite every Sunday at Mass. But there is also the Athanasian Creed. It is a very long composition, with much emphasis on the Holy Trinity. For a long time it was recited at Prime every Sunday. Later we recited it only on Trinity Sunday. Now not at all, to no one's sorrow because it is long (44 lines) and monotonously repetitive. For example: "The Father is eternal, the Son, eternal, the Holy Ghost eternal. and yet there are not three eternal but one eternal" And so on, through all the divine attributes. I see some of you are nodding off already.

That can be called a static presentation of the Trinity. But that is not the dynamic way the Trinity is revealed in Scripture. In the OT the first commandment of the Decalogue is, "You shall have no other gods beside me"--really a way of saying no other god exists. A strict monotheism is the indispensable basis for revelation of the Trinity.

Israel begins its creed with the "Shema`": "Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the Lord alone." And it goes on to explain what He is like in His own words, as in today's first reading: "The LORD! the LORD! A merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity." In the OT, just as in our creeds, God, the Creator of heaven and earth is called "Father." For example, in Isaiah:

"Were Abraham not to know us,
nor Israel not to acknowledge us,
you, LORD, are our father,
our redeemer you are named forever" (Isa 63:16)

Again: "Yet, O LORD, you are our father;
we are the clay and you the potter:
we are all the works of your hands" (Isa 64:7).

As revelation continues, Israel's faith comes to include the hope for a Messiah, a special king of the line of David who would bring to fruition all the wonderful promises the prophets had made to David's line. So great will he be that he can be called God's son. God says of him:

"You are my son;
today I am your father" (Ps 2:7).

And: "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me" (2 Sam 7:14).

The NT sees these promises realized in Jesus. In the OT this sonship could be thought of only as by adoption, but it prepares the way for the real or ontological Sonship of Jesus. In the NT God as Father is now primarily the Father of Jesus. At Jesus' baptism the Father says, "you are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). The loving, merciful Father of the OT is now He who, as in today's gospel, "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." The Son also identifies Himself in the same sort of loving terms: "Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light" (Matt 11:28-30).

It is impossible to think of the Son without reference

to the Holy Spirit. In the Christian dispensation the Holy Spirit appears at the very beginning: at the Annunciation, Mary is told that the conception would be accomplished through the Holy Spirit. That Jesus would be given the throne of David his father, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever. And at Jesus baptism, the Spirit is seen to descend on Jesus in the form of a dove. While in the OT the Spirit of God appears as one who speaks through the prophets and as a power to enable Judges, such as Gideon and Samson, to deliver Israel from their foes, in the NT the Holy Spirit is seen as preeminently a Person: He comes down in wind and fire to teach, lead, testify, and guide to all truth. He inspires members of the Church to be apostles, prophets, teachers. His special gifts are wisdom and love; His fruits are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

When Jesus is about to depart at the Ascension, He promises the Holy Spirit as a replacement for Himself, a parting gift to make up for His absence: "I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). The Spirit is to take the place of Jesus when He leaves: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always" (John 14:16). Jesus goes to the Father, but the Spirit remains with us.

Thus the Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, is revealed in the dynamism of action, each with its own form of action; each as a Person, but only one God because God is one.

If the Persons of the Trinity are dynamic in the way they are revealed, so also are they dynamic in the way they are appropriated by us. The Spirit came with wind and fire at Pentecost and, as Abbot James told us last Sunday, this

was the birthday of the Church. As individuals we each can say the Spirit is responsible for MY faith: Paul tells us, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). If the Spirit leads us to Jesus, Jesus leads us to the Father, for He says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Why is the Trinity, God's most inmost being, revealed to us and why do the three Persons come to us? It is because God is love and all He does is dictated by love. God created us in His image and likeness so that we might be truly lovable. And indeed He does love us as a father loves his children.

This love, revealed so long ago, continues to be demonstrated in what God has done for us in Jesus. We need only recall what was quoted earlier: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ..." (John 3:16). Or as St. Paul says, "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

Thus we are enveloped by the Father's love, a love which moved Him to send His Son to die for our redemption; the Father and the Son together send the Holy Spirit to sanctify us. Thus faith in the Trinity is not some abstract doctrine. If we understand it, it must be a call to gratitude and love that is deep, sincere, and equally dynamic, a love that leads us from the Spirit that sanctifies, through the Son who redeems us, to the Father, who is the source of all.

But it does not stop with us; God's love is all-embracing and His goal is to encompass all. The God who created the world is also the Lord of history. Somehow, all that exists must be gathered into God's unity, so that, as St. Paul says, "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). The love of God will accomplish this, but He will do it only by working through us, with us, and in us..