

### Trinity Sunday (Cycle A)

(Deut 4:32-34,39-40; Rom 8:14-17; Matt 28:16-20)

The Holy Trinity, which we celebrate today is, along with the Incarnation, the central mystery of Christian faith. In my seminary studies at Sant'Anselmo in Rome I was fortunate to have had Fr. Cyprian Vaggagini for dogmatic theology. The first year of dogma was divided into "De Deo Uno" (that is, **A**Concerning the One God@) and **A**De Deo Trino" (that is, **A**Concerning the Triune God@). De Deo Uno would typically have been largely philosophical, about the attributes of God. But to Fr. Vaggagini it made more sense to turn to the OT; after all, here was an inspired text that was all about the one God. In approaching the Trinity, in order to avoid all misconceptions, it is essential to hold that God is one; and that is a major point in the OT. At the beginning of the Mosaic covenant is the Decalog, of which the first commandment is that no God be worshiped other than the one God of Israel (Exod 20:3). At the beginning of Israel's creed was the great "Shema Yisrael": "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with you whole being, and with your whole strength" (Deut 6:4-5). Other people might worship their Baals and Astartes, but for Israel YHWH was Lord alone.

He is a loving and merciful God. After the Shema, a central proclamation is "The LORD, the LORD, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity" (Exod 34:6), echoed countless times in the OT.

I believe it was Blaise Pascal who said, "Our God is not the God of the philosophers. He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers.@ He is the God who acts. He created the

world. He directs history and He has a plan. He called Abraham, He formed Israel, delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and entered into covenant with them. He is not impassive. He is a jealous God, but that is because He loves. He calls for loyalty, demands merciful justice for the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed.

Jesus comes to us as our Messiah, the Son of this God, in order to make present to us in the flesh the very mercy, love, and forgiveness of this holy God. Jesus= forerunner was David, chosen to be king, chosen to be a type of the Messiah. Of David's offspring God said, "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me" (2 Sam 7:14), and "You are my son; this day I have begotten you" (Ps 2:7). Such statements in the OT referred simply to adoptive sonship, so also in YHWH's assertion to Pharaoh in Exodus, "Israel is my son, my firstborn."

It is different when Jesus comes. He is God's Son, not by adoption, but in very truth. St. John expresses it very well in his prologue: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth@ (John 1:14).

Jesus can say, "I and the Father are one." More concretely He says, "Just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes. Nor does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to his Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (John 5:21-23). So also can Jesus make the divine assertion: "Before Abraham came to be, I AM." The Jews understood very well what He meant, so they picked up stones to stone Him (John 8:58-59).

Why does God reveal this to us? Because in His love, God wants us to know Him and so to believe. This is

beautifully expressed in those verses: "For God 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" (John 3:16).

Jesus tells us what is in store for us: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places" and tells us that He is going to prepare a place for us (John 14:2). But He will not leave us alone: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always" (John 14:16). Jesus will no longer abide as He had, but He and the Father will provide an alter ego who would remain with us.

We know that happened at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The OT knew of the spirit of God, but only as an impersonal force, whereas the Holy Spirit who now appears is, above all, personal. The Spirit sends Paul and others on missionary journeys, dwells in our hearts, consoles, gives gifts of prophecy, of speaking in tongues, comes to the aid of our weakness, intercedes for us with unspeakable groanings, bestows wonderful gifts on us.

And this is the third and final stage of God's revelation and of God's intimacy with us: that He should be immediately present to each of us by dwelling in our hearts--much more intimately than God's dwelling in the Temple in Jerusalem, even more intimately than Jesus' walking with His followers through the Incarnation. This does not mean that religion is individualized, because the Spirit is a Spirit of love and thus is the bond of unity, of community, for the Church. In the second reading from last Sunday, Pentecost: "It was in one Spirit that all of us . . . were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit."

Thus the mystery of the Trinity is revealed. We have already been taught that there is only one God, but clearly we have three persons. And that is how we formulate this

mystery. Is it important that we know this? Absolutely! We are in intimate union with each of the three person in a different way, and so are drawn into the life of the Trinity. The Father creates us, sends His Son to redeem us, the Spirit comes to dwell in us at baptism.

The last Person to be revealed, the Spirit, is the one who brings the Church into being and, in a sense, gives us our marching orders. It has been said that the apostles expected a kingdom but what they got was a church. Yet in a sense the Church can be said to be the Kingdom of God coming into being. The circumstances of its origin tells us what the kingdom is to look like. The crowd at Pentecost was made up of people from every nation under heaven, listed by name even to Cretans and Arabs. The coming of the Spirit made them all into one body because love is the greatest gift of the Spirit. At the Tower of Babel humankind had been scattered through the confusion of languages; at Pentecost they were brought back together as all heard the apostles speaking their own language.

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, shows us the goal to which the Kingdom is to come, **A** vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne ... and exclaimed > Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever=@ (Rev 7:9-12).

These then are your marching orders from the Spirit: to love all peoples and oppose those who preach a message of contempt for other races, colors, nations, even for people speaking Spanish! who don't want to mingle with other people, who want to build walls and exclude; they themselves will be excluded. Love, and we, along with those they despise, will be among that great multitude that will one day stand before the throne of glory, crying out

**A** blessing and glory be to our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, forever and ever. @