

## TRINITY SUNDAY – A (June 4, 2023)

Having concluded the Easter Season last weekend with the feast of Pentecost, we return to the Sundays of Ordinary Time and today's feast of the Holy Trinity. We believe in one and only one God, and within that oneness there is a 'three-ness' of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Catechism says it well in declaring the Trinity to be 'the central mystery of Christian faith and life...the mystery of God in himself' (n. 234). And this is a uniquely Christian doctrine—for example, we share with Jews and Moslems the belief that there is only one God, but they do not accept the three-fold divine personhood of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We use the word 'mystery' in talking about the Trinity, and well we should since it is a mystery of the highest degree. "Mystery" here does not mean something we have to figure out or solve—like 'who done it' in a murder mystery. Instead, it refers to something we can know about to a limited degree but not fully or comprehensively. Catholicism is filled with mystery in this theological sense—think of the mystery of the Incarnation: God the Son taking on our human and bodily nature when conceived by the Holy Spirit in his Mother's womb. Or consider the mystery of the Eucharist: bread and wine becoming Jesus' true Body and Blood, the mystery we will celebrate next weekend on the feast of Corpus Christi. We believe in God as Trinity and in these other mysteries because God has revealed them to us and God does not and cannot lie...but who would be so bold as to claim to fully understand these mysteries?

No, we can't fully comprehend the Trinity, but that shouldn't surprise us in the least. After all, we are talking about the very nature of God here—how silly, how prideful we would be to claim that full understanding! But what really makes no sense is to refuse to believe simply because we can't fully understand. In fact, so much of life is filled with mystery, with things we cannot fully explain...and yet are nonetheless inarguably and very real:

1) consider our physical world and its wonders—the sun that is just exactly at the right distance from earth for life, for us to be sustained here; the presence of gravity whose reality we relearn every time we drop something on our foot, but whose mechanics still baffle the most brilliant scientists; the fact that this world exists, that life itself exists...where did it all come from?: We know these things exist, but they and we are filled with mystery.

2) consider the mystery of beauty—a sunrise or sunset that fills the sky with brilliant color and leaves us speechless, a painting or sculpture that leads us to marvel at man's creative genius, a piece of music that sends our spirit soaring and fills us with profound peace and perhaps even moves us to tears. Who can define or explain the power of such things in our minds and hearts? Beauty cannot be measured in a lab or defined with words, but who would dare deny its reality?

3) and consider perhaps the most incomprehensible of all mysteries, the mystery of love. Love exists, it's certainly real, but just try to explain or even define it. When I visit with engaged couples who are preparing for marriage, I always ask them to try to describe or define love—especially the love they will be promising to each other on their wedding day. They always struggle to do so. I ask that question not because I enjoy seeing them squirm, but instead to make the point that love is so much deeper and more profound than the world sees it; it's so

much more than warm feelings and emotions and physical attraction. Of course, those are good things as well—but real love goes much deeper than that.

The mystery of love, among other things, is about knowing and giving. You want to know the one you love, you want to learn more about them...but full and perfect knowledge doesn't come—there always remains some level of mystery. You married couples who have been married for 40, 50, 60 or more years—would you say you know absolutely everything about each other, or are there still some things that leave you shaking your head and thinking “I just don't get him/her”. And I suspect the same could be said about the love between parent and child—the love is genuine, but the understanding or comprehension may sink to a pretty low level at times...

The mystery of love is all about the gift of oneself to the one who is loved—giving all you have and all you are to the beloved with no expectation of getting anything back in return. And in a world like ours that focuses so much on ‘what's in it for me?’, this self-gift aspect of love is perhaps most mysterious of all. We hear or read on occasion of someone who is willing to suffer for the sake of the one who is loved. A friend of mine from another parish assignment once told me of her adult son who was diagnosed with cancer. She said that if she could, she would take on his cancer and endure it herself rather than have to see him suffer, and she'd do it in a heartbeat. This is love that is mystery to the nth degree and that cannot be measured out (let alone understood)...but is nonetheless undeniably real.

And here is where we come back to the mystery of Trinity, the mystery of God and of the divine love that gives itself completely for us. No one ever said it better than St. John in his words from today's gospel: “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.” God so loved the world that he gave—love is all about giving, and God gives totally and unconditionally. God the Father gave and gives us the gift of his Son—God the Son-- whose incomprehensible love for us is proved by Calvary and the empty tomb, and God the Holy Spirit fills us with his gifts and guides and strengthens us in this life so as to share in their eternal joy.

That is mystery—the love that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within that triune Oneness of God, and that is poured out and made available to us out of that divine love. Can we live with mystery—with not always being to understand and explain everything fully? Sure we can. We do it every single day and moment in living in this world of mystery...and our triune God makes it possible for us to know and live the mystery, the joy with and in him and with each other. Again from the Catechism: “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange” (n. 221). What an amazing mystery! And how blessed we are that it is completely and eternally real!