

Today we celebrate the solemnity of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity is ***the*** foundation of all Christian belief and teaching, and at the same time it is its most mysterious and perhaps most misunderstood. That sounds a bit like God, doesn't it? Well, it should, because it is. The Holy Trinity is God. And through the course of Revelation, from Abraham our father in faith to Jesus of Nazareth, God has been revealing himself to us; teaching us, showing us his divine nature expressed in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. For nearly two millennia we (the Church) have been trying to unpack and understand this mystery. While great strides have been made, our human nature and limitations will never allow us to fully possess God's knowledge and understanding of himself. In short, what we have learned, and continue to learn, is that God is God, and we are not.

All too often I think, priests and deacons spend their Trinity-Sunday-homily time trying to explain or re-catechize the masses on the Holy Trinity. While well-intentioned, usually by the time they're done, many have committed heresy without ever knowing it. I don't say this to be mean, but rather to illustrate the potential danger in trying to make the "mysterious" relevant. Now that's not to say that we shouldn't try to make something as mysterious as the Holy Trinity more understandable; not at all. But what I am saying, is that a true mystery is always a mystery. The minute anyone solves or understands a mystery, it is no longer a mystery; it has to be something else at that point, by definition. The problem is this. What if something, in its essence, at the core of its very being, is truly a mystery? Like God? What happens if we do try (or even claim to) de-mystify a true mystery (such as God) ?

Well, let's look back to the time of Moses and the Israelites and what happened at Mt. Sinai when he went up alone for forty days to be with God and receive the commandments he speaks of today. Remember what happened down below? As Pope Benedict once explained:

Weary of the journey with an invisible God, now that Moses, their mediator, had disappeared [up Mt. Sinai], the people clamoured for an actual, tangible presence of the Lord, and in the calf of molten metal made by Aaron found a god made accessible, manageable and within human reach. This is a constant temptation on the journey of faith: to avoid the divine mystery by constructing a comprehensible god who corresponds with one's own plans, one's own projects. What happened on Sinai shows the sheer folly and deceptive vanity of this claim because, as Psalm 106[105] ironically affirms: "they exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass."

We run the same kind of danger when we try to explain or oversimplify a mystery such as the Most Holy Trinity. That doesn't mean we should discard our God-given inclination to understand and express our faith, or explore its mysterious facets. As a Church that teaches and calls people to faith, those are things we have to do. But on a personal level, Benedict is exactly right. When it comes to our own faith, our personal, lived experience of the Triune God, confusion is easy to come by. The mystery of God often makes us uncomfortable, and we in turn try to construct a comprehensible God that is accessible and manageable on our terms. The only problem is that that kind of God, is no God at all; that kind of god is a divine servant, not a god worthy of worship and service.

The beauty of the teaching of the Most Holy Trinity, is that it sufficiently straddles the nature of God, who is at once mysteriously beyond our grasp and comprehension, and at the same time wholly immanent, reaching down, forming a people into his own, becoming one of them, so that one day they may all be where he is. What we know, and what we are able to say about the Holy Trinity, comes from what God has told us about himself. Now there are many ways we can put all that together. One of the ways I am fond of comes from the late Fr. Henri Nouwen who put his understanding of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) this way:

Between the Father and the Son there is only love. Everything that belongs to the Father, he entrusts to the Son, and everything the Son has received, he returns to the Father. The Father opens himself totally to the Son and puts everything in his hands: all knowledge, all glory, all power. And the Son opens himself totally to the Father and thus returns everything into the Father's hands. "I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I leave the world to go to the Father." This inexhaustible love between the Father and the Son includes and yet transcends all forms of love known to us.

It includes the love of a father and mother, a brother and sister, a husband and wife, a teacher and friend. But it also goes far beyond the many limited and limiting human experiences of love we know. It is a caring yet demanding love. It is a supportive yet severe love. It is a gentle yet strong love. It is a love that gives life yet accepts death. ***In*** this divine love Jesus was sent into the world, ***to*** this divine love Jesus offered himself on the cross. This all embracing love, which epitomizes the relationship between the Father and the Son, is a divine Person, coequal with the Father and the Son. It has a personal name. It is called the Holy Spirit. The Father loves the Son and pours himself out in the Son. The Son is loved by the Father and returns all he is to the Father. The Spirit is love itself, eternally embracing the Father and the Son.

What I like about this “take on the Trinity” is that it is relatable, yet mysterious; just like God. The mystery of God’s love is something that truly boggles the mind, yet at the same time, prompts us to respond with love and thanksgiving. It is no accident, I think, that the gifts of the Spirit which we celebrated last Sunday, help us balance the mysterious nature of the Triune God. On one hand you have the gifts of knowledge, wisdom, counsel, understanding which help us approach grasp the mystery of God; and on the other hand you have the gifts of courage, piety, and wonder and awe which allow us to appreciate the necessary mystery that is appropriate to God. On this Trinity Sunday, may the gifts of the Spirit allow us to live in *healthy* tension with these two aspects of God’s mysterious nature, and may they also prompt us to love as the Triune God loves: giving all of oneself; because one has been given all.