

Fr. John's Homily for Trinity Sunday, June 11, 2023

JMJ CHS

This week I will be celebrating the 22nd anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. It was June 9th, 2000 and I did preach. It was at St. Thomas in Ann Arbor and it was a big day for the parish and for the three newly ordained – myself, Fr. Gerald Gawronski and the late Fr. David Hudgins. We said 3 back-to-back Masses and each of us concelebrated each other's Mass and that year it was Trinity Sunday.

You know, they usually offer to find someone to preach for you on that day because they figure that you're quite nervous and probably would appreciate some help. Especially with difficult theological subjects like the Trinity.

But, being an older guy, I felt confident that I could do it. After all, it's the central mystery of our faith, the belief that God consists of three persons. But it was never definitively preached by Jesus. He did say at the end, at his Ascension, "*Go forth, baptize all nations, in the name of the Father and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*". But that, in itself, was not enough to proclaim a doctrine. It would take some years, and a lot of reflection, and the help of the *Third Person*, in order for the Church to officially proclaim the Dogma of The Trinity; Three Persons, one God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This also was a fulfillment of what Jesus said to His disciples at the Last Supper. He said that He *had not told them everything. It would have been too much for them. But that He would send the Holy Spirit who would lead them to all truth.*

Well, after all they had been through, maybe the concept of the Trinity would, indeed, have been a bit too much for them. It would be too much for the Universal Catholic Church, in general, for quite some time as they hammered out the particulars of the doctrine. But we have now had 2000 years to reflect on how the Church has established this as that centerpiece of our faith as we proclaim in our Nicene Creed.

So, let us reflect. We have the Genesis story where God creates man. Adam opens his eyes, and beholds the face of God. Well, I guess it went something like that. In any case, God is now in a relationship with the first man, and soon thereafter, the first woman. But we don't have anything in the original story identifying three persons. But there is one little hint. After the fall, God lamenting the sad situation says, "*Behold, the man has now become like one of us, knowing good from evil.*" But note that God doesn't say that the man has become like Me, no, he says the word US. The man has become like one of US. So, a question: is He speaking just of Himself, or is he speaking in the plural sense? In other words, are there two other Persons there with him? Namely, His Son, and The Holy Spirit?

And then there was Moses. Today we have a part of the story where God and Moses interact with each other on Mount Sinai. But there was an earlier encounter, also on Mount Sinai, at the burning bush. How many Persons were actually present... in each case? God spoke to Moses on

a regular basis, and we believe that he was the one that wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the bible, the early history, including that story about Adam, and Noah, and Abraham. And in the Abraham story, we have the three persons that visit with Abraham and Sarah in the desert and prophesy to them the birth of the Son. It's the icon that we have here, from the back of our church. But this Andre Rublev painting gives us an early indication of the "three-ness" of God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each looks identical to the other, but there are little signs that indicate their separateness.

OK, back to the New Testament. We have plenty of examples of Father and Son. And Jesus does talk about the impending arrival of the Spirit, but it's not until that 'Ascension moment' that we hear about the Holy Spirit as possibly part of a threesome. One among equals, and there with the Father and the Son from all eternity. And many of the Church documents, we can say now, came about because of the guidance and counsel of the Holy Spirit. The *Immaculate Conception*, and the *Assumption of Mary* into Heaven. Even the Holy Spirit Himself helped us figure out who He was. It's called the *Filioque* Question and quite early on, it was a big controversy in the Church. *Filioque* in Latin, means, "*and from the Son*". And in context, it means that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. Keyword, both. Not just the Father, as the Eastern Church says.

This is all high theology and we're not going to get into it here. Too deep. Suffice to say that for us in the Roman church, there is a Trinity of Persons who all share the same title, God, who has existed from all eternity. And we would be wasting our time to go too deeply. It's above our paygrade. Too deep. Too mysterious. And that is as it should be. I think King David said best in one of his Psalms. "*O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes raised too high. I do not concern myself with great affairs or with things too sublime for me.*"

Having said that, there are indeed theologians, who have delved a little deeper for our sake, and helped us to better relate to the mystery of the Trinity. Certainly one of the things that they have pointed out is that the Trinity is a community of persons. How many does it take to have a community? I would say two – a husband and a wife are the basic example in our culture. But they usually grow. They start a family, so the community starts off as a threesome. That new family, husband, and wife, and the children that proceed from them is most certainly a mirror of the Blessed Trinity.

~Fr. John