

07 June 2020, Trinity Sunday

Today is Trinity Sunday. I always enjoy preaching Trinity Sunday, tackling this defining Christian doctrine. St. Augustine wrote that anyone who denies the Trinity is in danger of losing their salvation, but anyone who tries to explain the Trinity is in danger of losing their minds. Some might ignore or discount this doctrine. I do not. Some abandon Trinitarian theology because it resists logic. Trinitarianism is not illogical, irrational; it is extra-rational, trans-logical.

Evelyn Underhill, a 20th Century spiritual writer, wrote that a god we can understand is not worthy of our worship. To believe in the Holy Trinity one must accept three inter-connected truths about Truth: 1) Truth is *revealed*, not subjective; 2) Truth is true in itself, not because it serves some other purpose; 3) Truth is received. Everyone may receive truth, but truth cannot be bought or bargained for. Truth is gift.

The Doctrine of the Trinity is God's self-revelation through which we glimpse God's own pure Being. St. Hilary of Poitiers, 4th Century theologian, begins his treatise, *On The Trinity*, remarking on Exodus 3:14: God said to Moses, "I am who I am". What Scripture teaches, writes Hilary, is that in seeking to know and understand God, we discover that God is always, "prior to our thinking." God is the eternal constant, before all human thought and experience, before all categories and concepts. Thinking about, experiencing God begins when one "stands before the certain reality" that is God.

The Holy Scriptures testify to the Trinity. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, 28:16-20, Jesus commands his disciples to go into all the world, baptizing in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At least six other New Testament passages explicitly refer to the Trinity. Reading the New Testament compels us to accept the Truth that God is Three Persons in one Being.

I said a few moments ago that all human beings possess the ability to know and experience God's self-revelation. While such ability varies from person to person, no matter how buried by sinful habit, clouded by moral corruption, or denied because of intellectual defect or laxity, this ability is in everyone.

How do we exercise this ability to know and be known by God? First, we allow our minds to be expanded so we become worthy of the God we seek. If Truth is only what my mind grasps, I impose on God arbitrary, limited standards of my own making. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, 'God is not what I conceive God to be but what God knows Himself to be.'

The fundamental context for this encounter with 'God-who-knows-Himself-to-be' is worship. For most of Church history theology was not a separate discipline but practiced in the context of a worshiping community. It is relatively recent that theologians became 'academics;' previously those who wrote and taught theology were bishops ministering in their dioceses, priests pastoring in parishes, monks and nuns praying in their monasteries, lay people practicing a daily round of prayer. Theology is "...thinking with understanding formed by piety." Traditionally, theology requires the warmth of faith and the depth of prayer.

Another building block is willingness to receive and accept what is given. Paul uses the word "receive" repeatedly: "We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God" (). This willingness sometimes is more like a wrestling match. There are hard, challenging truths in the Scriptures, the historic Faith, and the Church's Tradition. God's self-revelation will at times unnerve us. Therefore, intellectual preparation, emotional stability, and spiritual maturity are crucial.

This leads to one more factor: we receive through the Holy Spirit. God does not, as it were, provide map and compass and leave us to find our own way. God is not merely object God is the means through which we receive God's self-revelation. Jesus said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.* We journey with God, to know God, to be made one with God.

In closing I will say this. For me, the weirdest criticism of historic Christian Faith is that orthodoxy limits and spurning the Creeds and historic Faith opens one to endless possibilities. It is exactly the opposite: heresy limits because heresy always exchanges part of the truth, for all the truth. Orthodoxy opens us to the limitless, mind-blowing, ineffable Reality of God. Consider: the Nicene Creed explains nothing and proclaims everything, holding out as gift the awesome self-revelation of God. We proclaim Jesus is "...God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father...". This is God's self-revelation and we could, and should, spend our lives contemplating and living into the Reality expressed in those few fantastic phrases that transcend mortal logic.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise be yours, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, for ever and ever. Amen.