

THREE ROLES-ONE GOD: Caring Parent, Loving Son, Advocate for Good

May 18, 2008

Trinity Sunday

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“You, O Eternal Trinity, are a deep ocean, into which the more I penetrate, the more I discover, and the more I discover, the more I seek you.” [St. Catherine of Siena]

A. EXODUS 34:4-6,8-9 -- The Context. This book covers events probably around 1270 B.C. or 1440 B.C. to make sure that Israel never forgot God’s saving act of delivering them from slavery in Egypt; the law is a sign of God’s love and presence among them. **Today’s text** tells of **Moses’ prayer for God’s mercy and pardon of Israel’s stiff-necked people** and the renewal of the stone tablets broken earlier by Moses in anger over Israel’s idolatry of the golden calf. [JBC, p. 49]

B. (Ps) DANIEL 3:52-56 --The Context This book was written by an unknown author probably in the middle of the 2nd century B.C., Its main lesson focus is: God is reliable. [RG, p 267] **Today’s portion** is **the song of Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego praising God and dancing** in the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnessar. [TCB, p. 1092]

C. 2 CORINTHIANS 13: 11-13—The Context: Written by Paul around 57 A.D. to address dissensions, to testify to his authenticity as an apostle and to boast of his suffering endured for his ministry. **Today’s pericope** concludes this letter with a final appeal for peace in the community. **The final verse is one of the clearest Trinitarian passages in the NT.** [TCB, p 292]

D. JOHN 3:16-18---The Context:. The author is probably a disciple of the apostle John, son of Zebedee. It was composed around 90 A.D. This work announces Jesus as Messiah-Son of God. [DB, p. 446-450] **Today’s pericope** is one of the best known and loved verses in this Gospel and in all of Scripture. **Here the “world” refers to all humanity, to whom God sent “his only son” as a sign of love and as a source of eternal life.** Tragically, some people will prefer darkness to light. [RG p 371]

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

The teaching about the Trinity is one of the most fundamental in our Christian faith. It is not found as such in the Hebrew Testament. It is also a teaching that many would prefer not to have to explain. We often refer to it as a 'mystery' and therefore something which can be affirmed but cannot be fully understood, still less fully explained. In the Christian Testament, on the contrary, it means something, formerly hidden, which is now being made known to those on the "inside," something which we otherwise would not know.

One thing we can say right at the beginning: we are not dealing with outright contradictions or trying to believe the impossible. We are not being asked to accept that 3=1. **We are asked to believe that, in the one being we call God, there are three Persons.** Of itself, this is a statement we can neither affirm nor deny on the basis of reason alone. We are not in a position to make definitive statements about a transcendent God. We can only listen humbly to the statement in today's Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer where God is addressed as "*three Persons equal in majesty, undivided in splendor, yet one Lord, one God, ever to be adored*".

The message coming loud and clear through these readings is that **our God is close; he is not far away and he cares.**

In the First Reading (from Exodus) Moses is told that God is the "*Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness*". We really need to hear that, especially when we find times rough and painful.

Three Faces of God. Many years ago there was a film called "The Three Faces of Eve". It was the story about a woman who had a multiple personality. In a rather different way, we could speak of the Three Faces of God. In Greek drama of classical times, one could recognize the character, persona, being played by the mask that the actor wore. In theatre programs we have a 'Dramatis personae', listing the roles or characters in the play.

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So, we can say that **there are three personae or roles in our one God**. It might be helpful to look briefly at these three distinct roles of God as they are presented to us in Scripture:

I. Father Traditionally the Christian Testament speaks of God as Father but we know there are no sexual differences in God. So today people are also speaking of God as Mother. In either case, we see God as the originator, the source, the conserver of all life and of all that exists. "*In him/her,*" says the Acts of the Apostles, "*we live and move and have our being.*"

But God is an indwelling Lord. God is to be sought and found in all things, which he has created and keeps in being: from the simplest minerals, vibrant with atomic energy, to the most gifted and creative of human beings to the outermost galaxy way beyond our most advanced telescopes. So we have the lovely prayer of Moses in today's First Reading, "*Let my Lord come with us*".

II. Son If we can speak of God as Father, then the "only-begotten" is spoken of as Son. The "only-begotten" as such, having the nature of God, is both male and female, even though incarnation de facto took place in a male body. We know the "Son", of course, best through Jesus, the man born of Mary. In him there was the mysterious combination of the divine and the human in one Person. This is a truth as far beyond our comprehension as the Trinity itself.

Jesus is so precious to us because, in him, we have a partial unveiling under the limitations of humanity of our God. **The message of this revelation is primarily to let us know that God loves us with an overwhelming love.** This is the message in today's Gospel "*God loves the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.*"

III. Spirit Finally, we see God as indwelling Spirit. The meaning of the Spirit in practice means that God is indwelling in all creation and revealing himself through it. **Wherever there is truth or love or beauty, in nature or humanity, there is the Spirit of God.** Every act of truth and integrity, every act of love and compassion, every act of human empathy, every act of solidarity, forgiveness, acceptance, and justice is the Spirit of God working in and through us. When such actions appear consistently in us, they are a sign that we are under the influence of God's Spirit.

Let us then pray today with Paul in the Second Reading: as he concludes with this lovely Trinitarian prayer we use as a greeting at the beginning of Mass: "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God [Father] and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with you all.*" [Frank Doyle, S.J.]

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Do I take time during my day to remember the presence of God in all things?

Do I thank God every day for giving his only begotten Son out of his great love for me?

Do I open myself to the inspirations of the Spirit to love, to forgive, to comfort?

How well do I radiate the Spirit of God in my words and in my example to others?

[Sources: Scripture readings- *The Catholic Bible, NAB translation, Home Study Edition, (TCB)*, and its Reading Guide (RG); *The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, [JSB]* Jewish Publication Society; *The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (JBC)* 1968 edition; *Dictionary of the Bible (DB)*, J.L.McKenzie, SJ; *Daily Study Bible Series, John (DSBS)*, Wm Barclay; *Sunday Scripture Reflections* by Frank Doyle, SJ at <http://www.sacredspace.ie/livingspace>; Trinity Sunday. [Compiled by Michael Hosemann].