

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity – C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

Introduction

The dogma of the Trinity has not always been clearly defined. In fact, the word “Trinity” does not appear in Holy Scripture (neither does the word “pope,” “purgatory,” or “catholic” for that matter; as our fundamentalist brothers and sisters will be quick to point out). It is not even clear how the doctrine was understood in the time of the apostles. Through the first century of Christianity, the Church grew in its awareness of the mystery of the Trinity. The oldest doctrinal formulation of the Church’s belief in the Trinity is in the Apostle’s Creed, which, in the form of the ancient Roman baptismal symbol, served as the basis of catechumenal instruction and as a baptismal confession of faith since the second century.

In the early Church Christians began to ponder the mystery of God’s unity and the Trinity and attempted to explain more precisely the relationships among the persons of the Trinity. The use of the term “Trinity” (Greek: *trias*) first appeared in the second century in the writings of Theophilus of Antioch. The efforts to explain the relationships among the persons of the Trinity led to many errors in the early years, and most of those who tried to describe the relationships ended in heresy. Even the great theologians Tertullian and Origen stumbled into error in their attempts to explain the relationship between the Father and the Son. Arius, around the year A.D. 300, concluded that the Word (*logos*) of God was created by the Father to be the instrument of all other creation. The Word, the Son of God, was a perfect creature to Arius, but a creature nonetheless. Were this account true, then only the Father would be truly God, and the Son and Holy Spirit would then be divine only through adoption by the Father. In such a case, the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity would become merely a descending hierarchy with the Father extending His grace to the Son and the Holy Spirit, rather than a communion of co-equal and co-eternal persons, who together are the one, true God. The First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) was convened to answer the heresy of Arianism and that council clearly stated the “consubstantiality” of the Son with the Father. The First Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) affirmed that the Spirit must be adored and glorified together with the Father and the Son. Arianism finally died out almost 500 years later at the end of the seventh century but it has been revived in the teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons.

It wasn’t until the Second Council of Constantinople (A.D. 553) that the dogma of the Trinity was clearly enunciated and its technical expression was fixed.

The creed which we call the Nicene Creed, originated at the First Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 and was further amplified by the First Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. It was probably introduced into the western liturgy by the regional Council of Toledo in A.D. 589. That text, however, was a Latin translation of the Greek original and included a small addition which resulted in major theological disputes, namely, that the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father and the Son, rather than only from the Father. This matter continues to divide Catholic and Protestant Christians from Eastern Orthodox Christians.

1st Reading - Proverbs 8:22-31

The concept of wisdom is elusive because it is exceedingly complex. Wisdom can stand for the skill of a craftsman, such as that possessed by those who made Aaron's vestments (Exodus 28:3) or by the carpenters who constructed the Mosaic tabernacle (Exodus 31:3-5; 36:1). It denotes the ability of a professional mourner (Jeremiah 9:17) or a sailor (Psalm 107:27). The sage is an adviser to kings (Jeremiah 50:35; Proverbs 31:1) but is also an astute old woman (2 Samuel 20:16). It also has an intensely religious aspect: fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7; Sirach 1:9-10). Today we hear it being described as from God (divine) and absolutely prior to the visible universe. This priority implies superiority to all created things.

[Thus says the wisdom of God:]²² “The LORD possessed me,

The verb *qana* generally means “to acquire;” here the connotation is acquisition by way of birth. The rendering “the Lord created me” occasioned serious difficulty with the Arians, who used this text to support the created Logos.

the first-born of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago;²³ From of old

Hebrew has no word for eternity, but *olam* (translated here as “from of old”) signifies an indefinite period of time.

I was poured forth,

This is an image of birth.

at the first, before the earth.²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains or springs of water;²⁵ Before the mountains were settled into place, before the hills, I was brought forth;²⁶ While as yet the earth and the fields were not made, nor the first clods of the world.²⁷ “When he established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep;²⁸ When he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth;²⁹ When he set for the sea its limit, so that the waters should not transgress his command;³⁰ Then was I beside him

Wisdom witnessed all the creation and came to know its secrets.

as his craftsman,

Amon is either “craftsman” or “little child.” Little child fits the earlier birth imagery.

and I was his delight day by day, Playing before him all the while,³¹ playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the sons of men.

Gospel - John 16:12-15

All through the season of Easter our Gospel reading was from Jesus' final discourse to His

disciples; today is no different. The setting is at the Last Supper in the upper room.

¹² **“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. ¹³ But when he comes,**

The Holy Spirit promised in John 14:25-26. Even now, at the very end of His public life, there is much that Jesus can not say and that must await the enlightening activity of the Holy Spirit.

the Spirit of truth,

The “truth” to which the Holy Spirit guides the community must have the same sense as “truth” elsewhere in the Gospel: Belief in Jesus as the sole revelation of God and the one who speaks the words of God (John 3:20,33; 8:40,47). The Paraclete helps the community fulfill the injunction of 8:31-32: “If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.”

he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears,

As Christ has spoken of Himself in relation to the Father (see John 12:49; 14:10) so He speaks of the Spirit in relation to Himself.

and will declare to you the things that are coming.

Predictive prophecy is part of the Spirit’s function (see Acts 21:11). The Paraclete guides the community into its understanding of Jesus as the fulfillment of everything that had been promised in Scripture.

¹⁴ **He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.**

The function of the Paraclete is to glorify Jesus and to take what the Father has given Jesus and declare it to the disciples. The glorification which the Son has from the Father and which is in turn the glorification of the Father (John 12:23,28; 13:31), is continued in the Church (see John 14:13) through the activity of the Spirit which continues the work of Christ.

¹⁵ **Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.**

As the existence of the Church is the result of the shared life of the Father and the Son (see John 3:35; 5:20; 10:30) so its continuance is the result of the shared life of Son and Spirit.

Praying with Scripture
Modified *Lectio Divina* (Divine Reading)

Read

1. Read the passage out loud (if possible), slowly, simply to become familiar with it.

Reflect

2. Read the passage again, silently.

Ask the Lord to let you read and “hear” it as if this was the first time; what does it mean? How would you tell/explain this story in your own words?

(Not more than 5 or 6 sentences.)

Spontaneous **3. Pick one person from the passage: _____.**

Prayer

Imagine that you are in this person’s “shoes.”

(Note: If the passage does not specifically name persons in its text, simply see if the words themselves evoke any particular feeling. Does it call to mind a previous, or presently occurring, incident or relationship in your life?)

A. How does it feel to be in this situation?

B. Does it remind you of something or someone in your life?

C. Is there anything you would say or do differently?

D. Have a “heart to Heart” talk with Jesus sharing your honest feelings about anything that has come to mind in reference to your reflecting on this passage. It might be something that is weighing heavily on your heart, or something that moves you to a deep sense of gratitude and joyful praise.

Choose one word or phrase from this passage that has a special meaning for you _____.

Resting in God **4. Read the passage again. Close your eyes. Think of your favorite picture of Jesus and LISTEN to HIM.**

(Spend this time in simple silence, waiting and quietly listening for whatever the Lord might “whisper” in your heart.)