

Trinity Sunday, Fr. Rick - homilist

When Fr. Frank once preached on Trinity Sunday, he referred to the opportunity to preach on a theological teaching rather than the regular topics of the Gospel. I like the opportunity to preach on this theological teaching. Eleventh-century Archbishop of Canterbury St. Anselm defined theology as “faith seeking understanding.” I call the teaching of the Trinity the teaching of the inescapable presence of God and I will share it with you. Don’t worry about heresy, the Nicene Creed we pray together after the homily guarantees our orthodoxy!

When I was living at a Benedictine monastery, I encountered a miniature Bible stories museum – stories taken from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament which one of the monks had created. One thing I found unusual was a scenario of the post-Great Flood rainbow scene. Sitting on top of the rainbow was a miniature grandfatherly looking figure with a very long beard. Quite frankly as a child, I may have thought of God being such a figure, but as I got older, no. In defense of the monk artist, it was a children’s miniature museum.

When Jesus is speaking with the unnamed Samaritan woman at the well, he says that God is a Spirit, and one worships God in spirit and truth. Now, how do you imagine spirit? I imagine a spirit as having no form. Therefore, to me, God is formless. Perhaps this is why the second commandment states to not create graven images of God.

In the 8th and 9th centuries in the Eastern Church, an iconoclastic movement sought to remove all icons and other religious images from the church. This was countered with the faith understanding drawn from the letter to the Colossians where it is written that the Christ is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). Eighth-century monk, theologian, and apologist St. John of Damascus opposed iconoclasm - the removal of religious images. He advocated that he worships the creator of matter, and with regard to Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, the Word made flesh he wrote, “But I also venerate the matter through which salvation came to me, as if filled with divine energy and grace.”

Faith seeking understanding. In my theology, my faith seeking understanding, the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I understand as Mystery, Word, and Wisdom.

Prominent 20th-century Lutheran theologian Rudolf Otto taught of the Holy as the numinous, which he defined as the Wholly Other that arouses spiritual or religious emotion. Numinous is mysterious or awe-inspiring; evoking a sense of being overwhelmed; and can be merciful and gracious. Some can experience it as terror because it is overpowering. To me, this is God as mystery – a presence we can experience yet never fully understand.

The 13th century Italian poet Dante experienced this awe in his love of a girl named Beatrice. The 20th century writer and popular theologian C.S. Lewis became a believer in God through the waking of joy within him by reading some poetic lines. There are stories of people who have had this depth experience when they received communion or some other religious rite. Many have experienced this overwhelming awareness of something greater than ourselves as we look at a sunset, gaze at a piece of art, or hear music that is awesome. It may come during our prayer or meditation. It have been our awakening to the beauty of who we are as a sacred being, a child of God. It is an experience that, in that moment, you know there is so much more than what we see about us. This is the idea of the Holy which Otto writes about. I believe it is the mystery of God touching us. God is mystery

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Our Christian tradition speaks of Jesus as being the human face of God, fully God and fully human. The author of the Gospel of John speaks of Jesus as the Word of God made flesh. Paul in his letter to the Christ community at Philippi writes of how Christ Jesus was in the form of God and did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. Christ emptied himself, being born in human likeness, being found in human form. The Christian tradition sees Jesus as the fullest expression of God’s presence, love, and message within the flesh.

The Word of God is God communicating God's presence, love, and message to humankind. To me it is the Son of God. This Word is communicated and is an ongoing communication. Celtic Christian theologians speak of nature as the first book of Revelation. I find spending time in nature an opportunity to be refueled. I experience there the Word of God awakening me to God's ongoing message of seeing the blessings we have, and caring for them, whether those blessings are gifts, talents, and abilities we have, the blessing of one another, or the blessing of this world of abundance God provides for us.

In the Hebrew Scripture psalms, we hear, "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork." The Bible is also a means of the Word of God coming to us. The Word of God comes to us in the stories of the people of faith revealed in the Scriptures. Though the writings were formed over many centuries, using many different literary genres, and containing competing theologies in various places, it is a message that God loves us. The principal message of the Word of God is that God loves us. This message could challenge us to love ourselves, one another, and all that God has brought into being. God is word.

In Western Christianity, the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father and the Son. The Eastern Church maintains the universal statement from an undivided Eastern and Western Church that the Spirit proceeds from the Father. And the Spirit is active.

In the second ancient, symbolic Genesis story of creation, we read "God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Because of the belief that God enlivened us by God's Spirit, humankind has been referred to as "enfleshed spirits." French philosopher, theologian and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin posited, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience." The Spirit of God is within us, united to us.

The Christian tradition has often understood the Spirit of God as the Wisdom of God. The Spirit of God is to help us grow in wisdom. It is within us. On the Feast of Pentecost, the Spirit empowers those followers of Christ to share the new wisdom of the Gospel. God is wisdom.

So the teaching of the Holy Trinity is about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some say Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. I understand the teaching of the Trinity is about the Mystery of God, the Word of God, and the Wisdom of God. The Mystery of God is that "Wholly Other" beyond our ability to fully understand, yet who we experience in moments which are awe-inspiring, arousing spiritual or religious emotion, and possibly a sense of being overwhelmed.

The Word of God is God communicating to us continually that we are loved and inviting us to love one another and to care for the blessings God gives us. Jesus is the Word made flesh. And the Spirit of God is that internal presence knit to who we are to help us grow in wisdom. So God is above us as mystery, before us as word, and within us as wisdom – the inescapable presence of God. But the Trinity is more; it is the inescapable presence of God offering us God's inescapable love. Amen.

