

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

June 4, 2023

“The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the ‘hierarchy of the truths of faith.’” (CCC234)

How do you preach about the mystery of the Holy Trinity: Three persons—The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit—in one God, a mystery which has no explicit support in the scriptures. How does one talk about a mystery?

I have read that the Trinity is such a mystery and so hard on which to preach that some priests use this Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity as a good excuse to take a vacation. However, our priests, Frs. Paul and Ken, have come up with a more pastoral solution: To give us the opportunity to refine our preaching skills, we, the deacons, are preaching this weekend!

So, here we go!

After lengthy prayer and reflection on today's readings, I decided to look at the works of one of the great patristic Fathers and Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine of Hippo. St. Augustine spent over 30 years working on his 15-book treatise ***On the Trinity***, endeavoring to develop an understanding of the Trinity. A well-known and oft-repeated legend regarding St. Augustine gives insight into my quest to better understand and preach on the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity:

St. Augustine was walking by the seashore one day in deep contemplation, trying to understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity when he saw a small boy running back and forth from the water to a spot on the seashore. The boy was using a seashell to carry the water from the ocean and place it into a small hole he had dug in the sand.

St. Augustine approached him and asked, “My boy, what are doing?” The boy replied with a sweet smile, “I’m trying to place all the sea into this hole.”

With a chuckle, Augustine said to the boy, “But that is impossible, my dear child, the hole cannot contain all that water.”

The boy paused in his work, stood up, looked intently into the eyes of the Saint, and replied, “It is no more impossible than what you are trying to do – comprehend the immensity of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, with your small mind.”

With that, the child disappeared.

Some say that it was an Angel sent by God to teach Augustine a lesson on pride in learning. Others claim it was the Christ Child Himself who appeared to the Saint to remind him of the limits of human understanding before the great mysteries of our Faith.

Regardless, this legend, in which even one of the great Doctors of the Church was humbled, highlights the challenge in attempting to understand the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, given the limits of human understanding.

While the concept of the Holy Trinity is a mystery, it is not completely indecipherable. Mysteries, after all, are made up of clues. In any good mystery story, we obtain and piece together clues in order to see the whole picture; and, so it is with the Holy Trinity. One of those clues is found in today's second reading when St. Paul sends forth his blessings upon the Corinthians with the words, which are also used in the Introductory Rite of the Mass: **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.**

Scripture is replete with clues!! When we piece these clues together, we get a good glimpse into what God is: God is all about love. As the Gospel of John reminds us today "**God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.**" And when we, who are created in the image of God, live in love—we live in God, and God lives in us. Living in love, however, does not mean we must be the same as every other person. Each of us, as individuals, is unique; different from everyone else.

This uniqueness of persons is also true of the Holy Trinity: The Father is a distinct Person; the Son is a distinct Person; and the Holy Spirit is a distinct person. Distinct though they are, however, they exist in one being of **infinite** love; they exist in one unbreakable bond, in one infinite union of being together. While all of that remains a mystery to us, it is not so mysterious that we human beings cannot live a life that reflects and shares in the reality of God who loves. St. Paul also provided us with an additional clue when he advised the Corinthians to "mend your ways, encourage one another." To build upon that thought, in order to live a God-like life, we must:

- Forgive rather than condemn,
- Build-up and affirm rather than tear down,
- See the best in others, not the worst,
- Be self-sacrificial; not self-centered,
- Be giving, rather than selfish,
- Offer hope; not despair,
- Heal, rather than wound.

All of this is best affirmed and nurtured in what we call the family. There is nothing in life that more closely reflects the reality of the Holy Trinity than genuine family life. For it is in a family that we not only belong but discover, nurture, and affirm our own unique and individual personalities. It is the family that makes us individuals, and it is we, as individuals, who make our family; whether that family is our biological family or the family of our parish community here at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. It is in living the reality of being truly a family that we have a glimpse into the life of the Most Holy Trinity: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.