

Solemnity of the Holy Trinity (C), May 29, 2010

Good morning. This weekend we celebrate the solemnity of the Holy Trinity, and I'd like to begin this morning with a little short story that I first read 25 years ago, from a book called *Song of the Bird*, by a Jesuit named Anthony de Mello. It's one of the books we have on the table in the sitting area in our parish office. You might happen to recognize this story, because I shared it in a homily once before, a long time ago; it's entitled, The Formula.

*The mystic was back from the desert.  
"Tell us," they said, "what God is like."*

*But how could he ever tell them what he had experienced in his heart?  
Can God be put into words?*

*So...he finally gave them a formula – so inaccurate, so inadequate –  
In the hope that some of them  
Might be tempted to experience it for themselves.*

*Instead...they seized upon the formula!  
They made it a sacred text. They imposed it on others as a holy belief.  
They went to great pains to spread it in foreign lands.  
Some even gave their lives for it.*

*The mystic was sad. It might have been better if he had said nothing.*

I thought of that story several days ago as I began to prepare for this homily. It probably wasn't written with the dogma of the Trinity in mind, but I do think it applies very well. You see, in a few moments, we will say together the words of the Creed, the faith that we share as Christians. Those words were formulated centuries ago to try to express the mystery of God's life, as found in the scriptures and experienced in the living history of the early Christian community. And as described in the story "The Formula," it is absolutely true that real people fought and died over those words. In fact, it was the Roman Emperor Constantine who called together the Council of Nicaea in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century in order for the Church to settle once and for all the religious controversies that threatened the good order of the Roman Empire; and the creed we regularly say at Mass is what they finally came up with. You remember the words: ... "God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not made, one in Being with the Father"... and of the Holy Spirit, who "proceeds from the Father and the Son. Together with the Father and the Son he is adored and glorified."

Those theological words are important. But it is of course also true that the words are inadequate to describe the mystery of God's life, just like in the story. Now, I don't have any illusions that I can do better, especially in just our few moments today, but I'd like to offer three fruits of my prayer from this past week about the three persons of the Trinity, as we see them in our readings today. And I know... this is not "theology."

Our first reading is marvelous! It takes us all the way back to the beginning, before the earth itself, before mountains or fountains, before sea or sky – and we find God's Wisdom *playing*...playing on the surface of the earth... and finding delight in the human race. What a poetic reminder for us that all of this creation around us! ALL OF IT IS GIFT – from the vast universe that we are only the tiniest part of; to the mountains and waters that we enjoy in our area around Puget Sound; to the personal marvels of our own birth and growth, and our talents and abilities, even our heart, our hands, and our minds. ALL IS GIFT, FROM GOD.

Unfortunately, it's all too easy to take these many gifts for granted, or regard them as something we have coming to us. And the acquisitive world that surrounds us can infect us, make us want more -- and cause us to forget what should be our most natural response to the good we enjoy, which is GRATITUDE; gratefulness; a sense of how lucky and blessed we are as children of a loving God we call Father. (How appropriate, isn't it, that the word "Eucharist" means Thanksgiving?)

Our second reading is a letter from Paul about our faith in Jesus Christ, a faith that he says brings us peace and hope; a faith which enables us not only to endure afflictions, but to even "boast of our afflictions!" When I first read that I thought it was really odd that ANYONE would boast of afflictions; but in thinking about it more, I realized that there ARE some people who boast of their afflictions. Not that they do it as a sign of their faith, mind you, most often it seems like it's in the hope of getting a little sympathy! But of course Paul is not really focusing on the boasting, that's a bit of a distraction. He's talking about a special kind of peace and hope that our faith brings us, and that's something which can endure in the face of the greatest of difficulties. Jesus had that peace even in his darkest hour, and that peace was his last gift to his disciples.

In just a few moments we'll lift up our voices in prayer, by name, for people who right now are going through pain and sickness; and there are other parishioners besides these, going through other afflictions: depression, alcoholism, troubles in a relationship. And we will pray for healing for them, of course, but even more, let's pray for their strong faith in Jesus, for their ability to trust, as he did, that God is with them always. Let's pray for their deep peace and hope. I know I've told you many times before, from personal experience: it's always humbling to be close to someone who has that kind of faith, during those hard times. I pray for that kind of faith for all of you, for me, and for those people we'll lift in prayer.

Finally, our gospel reading, from Jesus' last words to the disciples at the Last Supper, tells us of the coming of the Holy Spirit. God knew that even Jesus' very own life would not be enough for us. We could not remember it all; we would not understand it all; sometimes we would not even believe it all. There would be times when we would feel alone, when we would hear other voices, many that would masquerade as "wisdom." We would finally be tempted to find our own truth, follow our own path, rely on our own strength. ***This is the great temptation of our relativistic, individualistic modern culture.***

And so the Holy Spirit has been given to us, as our gospel says today, to guide us to REAL truth. When we experience this Spirit, we find ourselves with a grace that truly comes from beyond ourselves. It might be that we will somehow find the right words to comfort someone who is hurting. Or we might experience a strength beyond our own that will help us to forgive someone who has hurt us deeply, and maybe even to do it in a way that builds a new beginning. Or we might inexplicably find the ability to admit we were wrong, and to tell someone we are oh, so sorry -- and thus experience a consolation that we never dreamed possible. Or we might just suddenly experience an unexplainable clarity and peace about something that has troubled us deeply for a long time. Or we might find the freedom within to let go and give deeply of ourselves -- humbly, generously, cheerfully, and gratefully. These are all signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It's beyond US.

Our gospel finally brings it all together by saying that the Holy Spirit will glorify Jesus -- in other words, when we experience the Spirit working in us in these ways, then we will understand in a deeper way the truth of who Jesus was and the glory that is the Father's. I know that to be true in my own life, and sometimes I find myself serendipitously happy because of it! But we should always remember too the message of Pentecost -- that the Holy Spirit is not given to us as a private grace, but rather is an outpouring upon all of the people of God, given so that we might as a community become the wind and fire of God's love on earth.

I hope that was a bit more than just a formula. Amen.

Deacon Denny Duffell