Holy Trinity B 2024

Brothers and sisters, “Wherever you are, in every place, at every hour, at every time of day, every day and continually, let all of us truly and humbly believe, hold in our heart to love, honor, adore, serve, praise and bless, glorify and exalt, magnify and give thanks to the Most High and Supreme Eternal God, Trinity and Unity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Creator of all! Savior of all! who believe and hope in Him, and love Him…”

Sisters and Brothers, on this Feast Day of the Holy Trinity, Peace and All Good, as I greet you with the words of St Francis, the conclusion of the Early Rule. He speaks, not in metaphors explaining the Trinity: no three-leaf shamrock, no concentric circles, no three equal-sided triangles. In words of praise and thanks, he says of the Triune Unity “…who, without beginning and end is—unchangeable, invisible, indescribable, ineffable, incomprehensible, unfathomable, blessed, praiseworthy, glorious, exalted, sublime, most high, gentle, lovable, delightful, and totally desirable above all else, for ever and ever. Amen.”

St Francis shares his experience of the Trinity in these many descriptive words. The idea of a Triune God came first from the experience of our ancestors in the faith—the Jewish people. They experienced God as Creator, who brought them and our world into being. They experienced God as Savior who freed them from bondage and who led them into a land flowing with milk and honey. They experienced God as Sanctifier, one who makes them holy. Not just three attributes as in the Old Testament, but three persons in one God. Christians place one of these attributes to each of the Three Persons of the Trinity—God the Father who creates, God the Son who saves, and God the Holy Spirit who sanctifies.

But the Christians went even further in their notion of God, because in the Gospels they heard Jesus call God “Father,” and spoke of His “Spirit.” And so, the idea of relations comes in. The Three Persons relate to each other as family, as a community—the perfect community—where each member’s being consists entirely in pouring our love for the others.

And so, we pray that it is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give praise and thanks to the Father, almighty and eternal God, for with the Only Begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, there is one God, one Lord, unity in a Trinity of one substance and equal in majesty.

Now the early theologians, like St Augustine, who first started thinking about these things, were not content even knowing all this. They tried to find out more about this God, this Trinity, this life from which comes all life and from which we all are born. They asked, “What do these Three-in-One do?” Augustine was inspired by St John the Evangelist to think of the Trinity in terms of love. He said “God is love.” He said the Trinity was Lover, Beloved, and Love. The Father is Lover, loving the Son into being. The Son then is the Beloved of the Father, and the Spirit is the Love that binds them. It is from this love that everything else comes. Love goes out of itself in extraordinary ways. St Francis brings us closer to this incredible mystery in The Canticle of the Creatures which mirrors this love. Pope Francis brings us closer to be and live in relationship to creation, animate and inanimate.

And so, it’s all very well for us to sit in awe and wonder as we contemplate this incredible mystery. But we have this world we live in. We have to ask ourselves, “What does this mystery of the Trinity mean? What does it mean to me, to community, to fraternity?” If we understand St John who says, “God is love,” and St Augustine who defines the Trinity as love, then we have to say that love is what defines us as well—who we are, how we live, how we relate to one another, and how we relate to the world, bringing Christ the Word to the world and the world to Christ. Our love must move us to be minstrels of the Lord, singing joy into joyless hearts, joining hands in the dance of life, and celebrating our lives together in peace without fear, being selfless to all those to whom we are joined, companions, sisters and brothers, born to live as Christians and professed to live as Franciscans, this Holy Trinity—to be lovers, to be beloved, and quite simply, to be love! To live such a conviction requires us to “Listen, to discern, and to Go Forth.”

