

Trinity Sunday Year B  
May 27, 2018

Readings: Deut. 4:32-34, 29-40; Romans 8: 14-17; Matt. 28: 16-20

Put forth as the “central mystery of the Christian faith” by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, at its core, the dogma of the Holy Trinity is the revelation of the inner life of God. In His innermost being, God is a relationship of love. Early Christians struggled to grasp this mystery, let alone to formulate a doctrine expressing it. A few heresies even sprung up along the way.

In the third century, Sabellius, a Libyan priest living in Rome taught something new about the Trinity. He argued that there are not really three distinct persons in God, but only three different ways or modes of considering God from His effects:, e.g., as creator (Father), redeemer (Son), and sanctifier (Holy Spirit). Bible passages which show Jesus talking to his Father (e.g., John 17), or declaring he is *going to be* with the Father (John 14:12, 28) became a farce.

The Christians in Rome quickly recognized his error and looked to their own tradition to demonstrate it. It is not always as easy to see the errors, and sometimes they are honest attempts to grasp a mystery, though they fall short. The Trinity was sometimes represented by a head with three faces set on one body, even sharing eyes; but in 1628 Urban VIII forbade the Three Persons to be shown in this fashion—so monstrous had it appeared.

In reality, it is rather easy to preach heresy today because every possible explanation falls short and some fall off track. Recall, the word trinity does not appear in Scripture. The Church had to develop her own terminology with the help of philosophy, e.g. person, substance, and relation. In doing this, she did not submit the faith to human wisdom, but gave a new meaning to these terms, which from then on would be used to signify an ineffable mystery,

“infinitely beyond all that we can humanly understand.”<sup>1</sup> From his *Confessions*, St. Augustine writes:

I speak of these three: **to be, to know, and to will**. For I am, and I know, and I will: I am a knowing and a willing being, and I know that I am and that I will, and I will to be and to know. Therefore, in these three, let him who can do so perceive how inseparable a life there is, one life and one mind and one essence, and finally how inseparable a distinction there is, and yet there is a distinction.<sup>2</sup>

The Catechism uses an analogy to see the reasonableness of the Trinity: “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> God is one, though He is not solitary. He is a communion of persons. In marriage, husband and wife become a communion of persons in the natural order.

More to the point, family life calls parents out of themselves whenever they exercise self-sacrificial love for their children, which is often! Again, no analogy is perfect. But the Trinity is a family of love, proceeding from love, begotten by love. And the family, also known as the domestic Church, becomes the fundamental building block of the larger Church.

The Catechism states, “For if we continue to love one another and to join in praising the Most Holy Trinity –all of us who are sons of God and form one family in Christ – we will be faithful to the deepest vocation of the Church.” (CCC 959)

The Holy Trinity is a mystery above us, though not irrational. May we know the Trinity as the perfect family of God’s love.

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC para. # 251

<sup>2</sup> *Confessions*, Bk. 13, Ch. 11,

<sup>3</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC para. # 2205