

## “FIRST IMPRESSIONS” HOLY TRINITY (B)

Deuteronomy 4: 32-34, 39-40; Psalm 33; Romans 8: 14-17; Matthew 28: 16-20

By Jude Siciliano, O.P.

Dear Preachers:

The bible does not have a specific teaching on the Trinity; the term does not even appear in the scriptures. The church's teaching about the nature of our triune God has a very complex history. What else would we expect as we search for ways to describe a mystery that is indescribable? Over the centuries, as the doctrine got formulated, words like “person,” “substance,” “essence” and “hypostasis” were used in ways that would have been completely unknown to the New Testament writers. Teachings about the Trinity have had to use analogies and metaphors.

As a preacher today, I am guided by the advice of the distinguished theologian of the Trinity, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, (*The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink, S.J. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990, page 1297).

*Preaching on Trinity Sunday:* The new cycle of readings provides a rich source for homilies on Trinity Sunday. The focus should be the mystery of redemption by God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as its consequences for Christian life. Preachers need not use the technical language of dogma, e.g. hypostasis, nor is it necessarily desirable to explain particular trinitarian theories, even those of Augustine and the church councils. Since liturgy is the ritual celebration of the events of the economy of salvation, preaching on Trinity Sunday should concentrate on the concrete reality of grace and divine love in the economy of salvation.

That's what I plan to do with the preaching on this day, draw on, what LaCugna describes as, the “rich source for homilies “from today's scriptural and liturgical texts.”

When Moses wants the chosen people to reflect on the nature of their God, he calls them to remember what God has done for them. They will know the kind of God they have by how God has acted for them. He tells them that there has been no other god, like their God, who had performed marvelous deeds on their behalf, no god who had spoken to them, as God spoke through Moses. The God they have come to know is not a distant and aloof God, but one who chose them from among the nations, delivered them from slavery and whose voice they have heard. God has acted powerfully on their behalf, with a “strong hand and outstretched arm.”

Moses, in LaCugna's words, is calling the people to "concentrate on the concrete reality of grace and divine love" they have experienced.

We celebrate a God today who has done what no other power on earth could do: chosen us; loved us without first requiring merit and accomplishment on our part; formed us into a believing people; walked with us through the ages and stayed with us when there was more than enough evidence against us ---as individuals and church. This God, who from the very beginning of the Israelite people till now, continues to reach out to us at today's eucharistic celebration and invites us, as Moses says, to "fix in your heart, that the Lord is God in the heavens above and on earth below, and that there is no other." Moses urges us today to enthusiastically celebrate the God who has chosen us, stayed with us and will not abandon us.

We can do what Moses suggests the people do—remember God. We look over the landscape of our own lives, notice the moments life tested us severely and recall how God sustained us. We remember times we were unfaithful to our calling and God still extended merciful arms to us. We celebrate too the love others have showered on us, those who were concrete signs of God's gratuitous love and tenderness for us. Later thinkers would formulate the monotheistic theology implied in this text. But what the text does for us today is to draw us into the celebration and help us remember and say with Moses, the chosen people and one another, "...there is no other but God!" If someone were to ask us to "explain" the Trinity to them we might respond, "Well, I can't do that, but let me tell you what I know about the Trinity in my life, for I have experienced the Trinity first hand."

Today's gospel reading from Matthew is the closing selection of his gospel. He is true to form; what he has been saying throughout his gospel, he now sums up. Matthew's gospel has had a strong emphasis on Jesus' presence with his band of followers. From the beginning, we are told that Jesus is called Emmanuel, God-with-us (1:23). Now, as he is about to leave, he reaffirms his identity as Emmanuel, "And behold I am with you all days." With the assurance that he will always be with them, Jesus can now tell his disciples to "make disciples of all nations."

Whereas earlier they were only to go to Israel (10:5-7), now he broadens the scope of their work to include all people. We have had hints this inclusivity was coming. In the genealogy early in the gospel, Matthew does a most untypical thing for his time—he includes women and godly members of the gentiles in his list of Jesus'

ancestors (1: 3ff). Of course, we remember the astrologers, who came from the east, were also gentiles. As his gospel proceeds we meet faith-filled Roman soldiers and a Canaanite woman. Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee, which Matthew reminds us is called “of the gentiles (4:15). A really big moment is described in the parable of the Last Judgment (25:32ff) when all nations are to be judged. The criteria will not be based on those who belonged to a select tribe, religion or nation; but according to how they treated “the little ones”—the hungry, naked, thirsty, etc.

It comes as no surprise then that Jesus’ last instruction draws on what has been already hinted at in the gospel. He instructs his disciples to baptize and to teach others. There are no boundaries set for those who are to be addressed, the message is for all. What is essential in the message is baptism and its consequences: the baptized, Jesus tells them, are to be taught to “observe all that I have commanded you.” He wants disciples to live his new law of love and be rooted in the hope it gives. They are to live as citizens of a new reign of sisters and brothers and depend on Christ’s mercy as they welcome all who recognize their need of salvation and healing.

The disciples have gathered in Galilee with the risen Lord. There is something mysterious about him. They worship him but still have doubts. It is comforting to know they still aren’t perfect, for we too gather to worship the mysterious presence of the risen Lord in our lives—and we still have doubts. However, their doubts don’t disqualify the disciples from being Jesus’ ambassadors to the world. He reassures them they will not be left on their own, he promises to continue to be Emmanuel for them, “...I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

Those sent out and this includes us the baptized, must remember what we were taught in Matthew’s gospel about the reign of God. Individual Christians and the church as a community, are expected to be a beatitude people: always hungering for growth in love; merciful to enemies; single-minded in our commitment to our Lord, and ready to accept persecution in Jesus’ name. Jesus taught that our response is to be total, not only in observable religious practices, but also in our unseen thoughts and attitudes. His disciples are to teach the world to act as Jesus acted, giving to the poor, and vigilant in prayer and fasting. The essence of Jesus’ commands was that we are to act in love (7:12) and he told us that we will be judged according to how we loved (25:31ff).

We look up at the stars at night and marvel at what we see. We praise the Maker of such majesty and beauty, and, on this Trinity Sunday, we ask about the nature of our God. By turning to both scriptural testaments today, we learn that our God is not a distant and aloof Creator but has acted mightily on our behalf and wants to establish intimacy with us. God went so far as to enter our world so as to open our eyes to God's loving nature. In Jesus we learned God wanted to deliver us from sin and all that fragments and divides the human community. Jesus sent out his disciples and through his Spirit, continues to speak the good news into their hearts. He guides and strengthens them as they share that news with others. God is certainly the marvelous Creator of the heavenly spheres; but more. As we learn through Jesus and re-learn through his Spirit, God is irrevocably and lovingly on our side.

## QUOTABLE

### FATHER'S DAY

Here is some advice from G. Thomas Ryan in the SOURCEBOOK FOR SUNDAYS AND SEASONS, 1991 (Liturgy Training Publications).

Father's Day is today—a holiday of “civil religion.” The day does not need too much attention from the church; advertisers will ensure its observance. The Book of Blessings (chapter 56) contains three suggested intercessions ...and a simple blessing for this day. Call people's attention to the blessing in “Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers” (p.198) for use at home. As with Mother's Day, pastoral sensitivity is needed: Consider how this day is more a celebration of a particular kind of love rather than a glorification of a particular sex or vocation. (P171)

### BLESSING PRAYER FOR FATHER'S DAY

Blessed are You, Lord and Source of All Life, who has given to us  
the gift of the father of our family. Today, we honor him,  
and we thank You for the numerous good things that are ours because of him.  
His love for us has been a sign of Your divine affection and a sharing in Your holy  
love. His continuous concern for our needs and welfare is a mirror of Your holy  
providence.

And so, as we honor him, we praise You, God and Parent of All Peoples.

Bless him this day  
with Your strength and holy power that he may continue to be a sign of You, our  
God,  
and a priestly parent to our family. May we who have the honor of bearing his

family name  
do so with great pride.  
May we, the members of his family, assist him in his holy duties as a parent with  
our respect, our obedience and our deep affection.  
Bless him, Lord,  
with happiness and good health, with peace and with good fortune, so that he who  
has shared of his very life may live forever with You, his God and heavenly Father.  
This blessing and all graces, we pray, descend upon the father of our family:  
in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen+

-----adapted from PRAYERS FOR THE DOMESTIC CHURCH, by Edward Hays

#### QUOTABLE:

The fundamental insight of the doctrine of the Trinity is that God's being is essentially relational. The Johannine tradition expresses this (without, of course, anything like a developed Trinitarian theology) in its simplest and yet most ontologically profound affirmation: "God is love." It follows that, as beings created in the image and likeness of God, our salvation comes as we "put on Christ" and allow our lives to be patterned after the loving, generative and reciprocal relationality that is the very being of God as revealed to us in Christ by the power of the Spirit.

In the Eastern Christian tradition, this account of our salvation is called *theosis* or divinization. We might also call this capacity to share in the divine life of God spiritual communion. But this spiritual communion does not demand an escape from our world. Rather, our participation in spiritual communion comes in our authentic engagement in the multi-faceted web of human relationships that constitute our historical existence. This life of communion is disclosed in the creation stories of the Book of Genesis, in which we discover the call to the life of communion in our basic need for human companionship and in the demand for faithful stewardship of the earth itself. Salvation is concerned with the transformation and empowerment of our capacity for authentic engagement with God, others and the world itself.

The arena in which we work out our salvation and seek after God is bounded by the patterns and practices of daily living. Consequently, the Gospel of salvation stands in direct confrontation to the overarching ethos of our consumerist culture. It stands as a challenge to the seduction of modern technology, which seeks to

render the world around us and time itself subject to our manipulation and control. It is this Gospel of salvation that must be proclaimed with renewed vigor by the church. The effective proclamation of this Gospel demands the cultivation of a new Christian mystagogy and a new asceticism.

----Richard R. Gaillardetz, AMERICA, December 7, 1996

### POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:.....

- Darrell C. Woods #0497100 (On death row since 5/22/95)
- Timothy Richardson #0492102 (6/1/95)
- Earl Richmond #0343602 (6/1/95)
- Richard Cagle #0061528 (6/16/95)

-----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”

Jude Siciliano, OP

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