

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS***    HOLY TRINITY (B)

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

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

The title of today's feast can be misleading to both congregation and preachers. This is not a day we celebrate a dogma of the Church. Dogmas are important, but we don't worship them as we gather for liturgical celebration. Nor is a day for a catechism lesson on how one God can have three faces and be called by three different names. I don't plan to take a shamrock into the pulpit this weekend to show how God could be one and three at the same time.

Someone said once, "Anyone who talks of the Trinity, talks of the cross of Jesus and does not speculate about a heavenly riddle." (Sorry, I don't know the source for this quote.) Christians know about God through our experience and key to that experience is something we have in common – suffering and the cross. I know a 56-year-old woman who is a vibrant and fun-loving woman. She loves her family, and they return that love. She has been described by her children as "the glue that holds the family together." She had severe back pain, and an X-ray revealed a broken vertebrae.

But when she was in surgery they discovered cancer. Further tests showed the cancer had spread to her lungs. It had metastasized. Her daughter called a young woman friend and wept hysterically over the phone asking, "Why did God do this to her?" It is a question we have all heard during similar crises and maybe it is a question we too have asked at similar times in our own lives. It is the question we ask out of pain and confusion, when life takes a harsh turn and threatens our faith.

It is really a Trinity question, isn't it? Who is our God? What is our God like? It isn't a question about church dogma or "heavenly riddles." When Jesus looked at what was coming at him in the Garden of Gethsemani he felt it was more than he could bear, so he asked God for it to be taken away. But God wanted to stick it out with us, not pull the emergency brake and get off. If Christ had been given a quick exit that night in the garden, then we would feel even lonelier in our struggles and pain. Instead, God stayed with us; Christ showed us in his obedience that no matter how many physical or emotional stresses we have on us, God is not a stranger to our pain: no stranger to emotional pain – Jesus wept; no stranger to physical pain –

Jesus was broken on the cross. That's in the scriptures.

What's not in the scriptures is that God sends us pain and suffering to test our faith. After all, what good parent would do a thing like that to a beloved child? And we do believe God loves us and that we are God's children, don't we? Paul reminds us in the letter to the Romans today, "The Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God,..."

What is also not in the scriptures is what some people say to others who are in pain to console them. "God never gives us more than we can bear." When people say things like that, I imagine God pressing down on someone to test their faith but stopping just short of their breaking point. What a miserable and harsh God that would be! That's not the God we celebrate on this feast of the Trinity. Here's another one: "God helps those who help themselves." I can't tell you how many times I have heard that quote used to describe God. I have even heard people say that in scripture groups with open bibles on their laps and they quote it as if it were in the Bible they were holding. If we could help ourselves we wouldn't need God, would we? When we are struggling and feeling lonely in our pain, we don't need to hear about a God who will help us, but only if we can first help ourselves.

No – life has its ways of testing us; sometimes giving us more than we can bear. God is the one who helps us carry what life piles on us. Not only so we can just bear up under our burdens, but that we can even grow and mature through them. God can get us through to the other side of suffering stronger than when we first entered in. Now that's the triune God Jesus sends his disciples into the world to proclaim.

When Jesus sends out his disciples to baptize, it is in the name of the God we have come to know through him: "Father, Son and Holy Spirit." God the Creator – the source of life, the Creator who loves the works God had made. God the Christ – God in our flesh, who walked our walk all the way through death to resurrection. God the Spirit – the very life of God, in Jesus, offered us again here today as we celebrate and pray together.

How do we define the Trinity? Jesus tells us – "I am with you all days, until the end of the age." Jesus has "defined" God for us – revealed God already with us. So, when someone calls us on the phone or weeps on our shoulder, and asks, "Why did God do this to me? What have I done to deserve this?" We can respond, as the

young woman I mentioned above did, “I don’t understand all this. But I know God didn’t put this suffering on your mother. God is with us in this, and God is crying with us too.” This young woman who said this to her friend is a high school graduate with three small children – she was balancing the youngest on her hip as she gave this response to her friend. There she was, a theologian, explaining the Trinity in a way her grieving friend could understand and embrace!

### QUOTABLE

*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.

---Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*. ed. Peter E. Fink, S.J. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990, page 1297).

### FAITH BOOK

*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. “Faith Book” is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.*

#### **From today’s Gospel reading:**

Jesus said to his disciples.... “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

#### **Reflection:**

Our faith points over and over to the revelation of our Triune God in creation. The psalms proclaim the wonder of the sea and stars. Jesus spoke in parables using trees and flowers and seeds and sun and farm animals to teach us about His Father and the love which pours out from the Trinity. The Spirit’s coming was seen as fire. The Bread and Wine and Oil used in our sacraments are products of the earth.

We learn much about God from and through the natural world and it's seasons of dying and rising.

**So, we ask ourselves:**

- What has the natural world around me taught me about God?
- How have I responded to the God I discover in nature?

## **JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD**

### **“Creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity”**

*(Catechism of the Catholic Church # 290-292)*

Our Catholic faith, our Sacred Scriptures, our Sacraments and our tradition point over and over to God's revealing of God's Trinitarian Self in creation. The psalms proclaim the wonder of the sea and stars. Jesus spoke in parables using trees and flowers and seeds and sun and farm animals to teach us about His Father and the love which pours out from the Trinity. The Spirit's coming was seen as fire. The Bread and Wine and Oil used in our sacraments are products of the earth. We learn much about God from and through the natural world and it's seasons of dying and rising.

“Sacred Scripture calls believers to care for God's creation. In examining environmental questions, the concept of the "common good" is central. **It compels us to work towards worldwide cooperation on issues of global concern. At its core, global climate change... is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both 'the human environment' and the natural environment.**” *(Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, US Catholic Bishops 2001)*

In 2006, the *Catholic Coalition on Climate Change* was launched with the support of both the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment. The Coalition sends regular updates to its growing database of interested Catholics and others to keep them informed of its activities and current events.

### **Did you know?**

§ When 1 ton of plastic bags is reused or recycled, the energy equivalent of 11 barrels of oil is saved.

§ The average meal travels 1,500 miles from farm to table. Buying local, in-season

foods means healthier, riper, more environmentally friendly foods.

### **What can I do?**

§ Go to: <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/> to sign up for email information, learn more about Catholic teaching and Climate Change, and perhaps to add your name to the growing list of those who have taken the *St. Francis Pledge*.

### **I/We Pledge to:**

**PRAY** and reflect on the duty to care for God's Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.

**LEARN** about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.

**ASSESS** how we-as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations- contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.

**ACT** to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.

**ADVOCATE** for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

### **POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES**

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "*People of Faith Against the Death Penalty*" If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Elmer R. Mc Neill            #0528622    (On death row since 4/9/96)
- Eric Murillo                #0499258    (4/18/96)
- Guy LeGrande              #0238344    (4/26/96)

Central Prison    1300 Western Blvd.    Raleigh, N.C.    27606

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

"First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, [Click Here](#).

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”

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