

“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:

Prenotes:

I call your attention to Connie Schoen's justice reflections this week along with a prayer for Father's Day you may find useful in your parish celebrations.

We are in the weeks of the "Big Themes." Last week Pentecost, this week Trinity Sunday, next week the Body and Blood of Christ. Great possibilities for preaching, but dangers for the preacher. Trinity Sunday is a good example. If ever there were a day for abstractions and theological language in our preaching, this would it! The higher we rise in abstract and doctrinal language today, the deeper we'll fall. Do we think the "topic" of our preaching today is to be the Trinity? Is today the day we feel the responsibility to "explain the Trinity for the people," or provide some images, some analogies to help the understanding of this mystery? For example, there are the attempts to illustrate the nature of "threeness in oneness" by some homey examples; the shamrock comes to mind. Or, the Trinity is likened to water, one element but with three forms: steam, liquid and ice. Another-- the Trinity is like a woman who can be wife, daughter and mother.

Maybe another approach would help us be more concrete and speak more directly to where people are. As usual, stay close to what the chosen scriptures for the day say and try to speak of God through them. Today, as always, God is the issue. Notice that God is "defined" in today's readings in a three-fold way, as one who engages, confronts and invites willing participation. God is seeker and savior, one who continually chases after us, offering us life and an invitation to get involved with God and one another.

Moses starts our Trinity Sunday reflection and reminds the Israelites and us about the nature of our God. The Deuteronomy reading, rather the "proclamation," is not about doctrine, it is about an experience. God's identity is known by what God has said and done. We are reminded of the God who is the creator. God has left fingerprints on the scene, and we need to read them. God has spoken and performed "signs and wonders." Each act is seen as a message, a word from God. Through Moses, God is asking us to recognize what God has done and calling us to respond. The initiative is, as always, God's. The reading stirs up awe and praise

for a God who would do such a thing for us. Notice God's activities: God created, spoke, ventured forth, chose--and did all these things, "before your very eyes." God's wonderful deeds for us go beyond just ourselves. These early days of summer evoke constant reminders all around us of God in nature. We are heading out to the beaches and to parks for picnics. Invite people to read the signs of God in nature, and to be attentive to the message nature has for us about God's wonder and power. To ignore, or even abuse these natural signs, is to reject a key means through which God seeks communion with us---the God who is "in the heavens above and on earth below...."

The recitation of the deeds of God is meant to move the people to acknowledge and praise God. This reading has a liturgical sound and begs for a response. It proclaims that the God of Israel is the God who has done this and through rhetorical questions, proposes the uniqueness of our God. Often it is in the replaying of past moments of our lives that the presence of God is most clearly seen. Moses is modeling for us what we need to do ourselves: remember and acknowledge.

Like Moses, the presider (at the Eucharistic prayer) recites the wonderful and actual deeds God has done for us in Christ and stirs up our awe and gratitude. The preacher might encourage the congregation to listen to how many times the words "thanks," "praise" and "blessed" are used in the Eucharistic prayer that follows. All these words are said in response to hearing and being reminded of God; the way Moses reminds the people of their God. The worshipers might call to mind how God has been with them and their loved ones as they (we) struggled during difficult times. Invite the congregation to make the prayers of the Eucharist their heartfelt prayers this day. Each worshiper hears the words of praise and makes them her/his own, so that all our voices are united in praise of the God who has an "outstretched arm toward us."

It is only after Moses has stated what God has done that he invites the people to respond with obedience to God's statutes. We have "fixed our hearts" on God and respond, not as subservient slaves to a strict master, but as a people desiring to follow the path this gracious God has laid out for us.

Previously in Romans, Paul has been saying that the Spirit makes Christian life possible. The Spirit is the source of a new status with God, for we are now God's children; not simply because God has created us or because a mere title has been

bestowed on us, but rather, a new relationship has been established for us by Christ. Notice, having been made children of God through Christ, we are named "heirs as well." We have not earned this status, it has been given us, and Paul says the Spirit within each of us reminds us of this. This gift we have received is the central idea of the entire epistle. Is it no wonder that it was the poor who first accepted Paul's message. They heard that, though they had no dignity in the world's eyes, they now had status bestowed on them. We can have courage to "cry out" to God because the Spirit emboldens our prayers. We do not look at who we are and how worthy we feel, we look to the work of Jesus and receive the courage of the Spirit dwelling in us to cry out as people of status, i.e., children of God. Paul has been "defining" the Trinity in this epistle; it is the God who meets us in experiences of loving care and even enters into our suffering with us.

In the course of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has told the disciples to go on mission only to the Judeans (Mt 10: 5-6). The story started with a small group and with its leader staying pretty close to home. These are the final verses of Matthew's Gospel, and the leader has returned for some last instructions. They are not to hide out and nurture themselves until they feel ready to venture into the wider world. They are ready now, whether they think they are or not. Jesus is directing them to move beyond their narrow confines, beyond their group. They are to go to the entire world.

He has assured them that he will stay with them in these ventures. He wants to see his work completed. He wants us to be a part of it, and we are ready to do that whether we feel it or not.

These readings today show us the kind of God we have. People may wonder about a distant or uncaring deity. But we hold these scriptures to be true. We know who our God is; a personal God who chose not only to create us, but to stay with us each step of the way. This God sent Christ to share our human struggle even up and through death with and for us. The same God, through the Spirit of Christ, stays with us. Our celebration today is not a chance to reiterate dogmatic beliefs, but a moment in which we gather together to say what we believe: our God is personal, involved in our lives and is calling us to come home to God together.

JUSTICE PREACHING

One word sums up the essence of all three readings for Trinity Sunday-- "powerful." Each contains a declaration of truth to which the psalmist responds, "Blessed are the people God has chosen to be God's own." The voices of Deuteronomy, Romans, and Matthew are strikingly poignant in the midst of the post-modern world's struggle and search for meaning. They speak to the heart of Jesus' life and mission as he announced it, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." The principle is simple. Fullness of life is attained only through steadfast fidelity to the God of abundant life and love.

In "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families," The New York Times bestselling author, Stephen Covey, challenges U.S. families to reshape their lives together around a set of basic principles that can lead to healthier, happier relationships. Covey writes out of his conviction that building a family culture that works does not depend on constantly searching for newer, better techniques. All one needs, says Covey, is a basic framework of fundamental principles that one can apply in any situation. The seven habits are: (1) be proactive (become an agent of change in your family), (2) begin with the end in mind (develop a family mission statement), (3) put first things first (make family a priority in a turbulent world), (4) think win-win (move from "me" to "we"), (5) seek first to understand...then to be understood (solve family problems through empathic communication), (6) synergize (build family unity through celebrating differences), and (7) sharpen the saw (renew the family spirit through traditions). The underlying premise is that if one works the principles, the principles will work.

Today's readings reveal foundational principles, 3 essential habits of "highly fruitful Christians": (1) fix in your heart that the Lord is God in the heavens above and on earth below, and that there is no other. Keep God's statutes and commandments...that you and your children after you will prosper; (2) we are children of God...heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ, if we suffer with Christ we will be glorified with Christ; (3) go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Within these sacred texts lie the necessary elements of the Christian life: fix your mind, heart, and will on God; by the power of the Divine life within you, conform your life to the way of Jesus; by the authority of the Holy Spirit given to you

proclaim the truth of abundant life you have received as a gift for the healing and transformation of the whole world. Need we search any farther for new techniques or new ways of being in this world? I think not. We may struggle to put the principles into practice, but they are clear. They can be applied in every situation. Jesus showed us that they work.

Jesus saw a world filled with God. He imagined and believed that one day we would be able to see it too. With our minds and hearts fixed on God, our beliefs, attitudes, and actions conformed to Jesus, and our spirits empowered by the Holy Spirit is there any hope or dream for a just and peaceful world that cannot be realized? Is there any enemy that cannot become friend? Is there any brokenness that cannot be healed? The journey to a just and peaceful world begins in the soul of every human being. We continue the journey knowing that God is always for us, that Jesus has shown us the way, and that the Holy Spirit, the breath we breathe, is the life of the universe.

-----Connie Schoen, OP

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. (P. 171)

BLESSING PRAYER FOR FATHERS 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

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“Blessings on your preaching”

Jude Siciliano, OP

FrJude@JudeOP.org