

First Impressions TRINITY SUNDAY -C-

Proverbs 8: 22-31 Psalm 8: 5-9 Romans 5: 1-5 John 16: 12-15

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

PRE-NOTE:

We have some updates on our preachers' webpage. Go to www.preacherexchange.com and check out a new preaching book review and reflections on Justice Preaching and Dominican preaching. (You are hereby given permission to read the Dominican page, even if you are not officially a member of the Order of Preachers!)

The feast of the Most Holy Trinity celebrates one of our most ancient beliefs. But we don't celebrate a dogma or official church teaching today. Nor will we try to "explain" the teaching in our preaching this weekend (cf. Quotable below). Instead, we celebrate and reflect on our relationship with God and what our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier has done for us. The scriptures remind us of our God's graciousness, and we rejoice in the God who has acted so mightily and lovingly on our behalf.

Let's focus on the second reading today because the selection from Romans speaks of the Trinity in very basic terms. (It is always a challenge for the preacher to preach from Paul and today gives us a good opportunity. So, why not give it a try?) Paul articulates the work of the Trinity. God, our Creator, gives peace to us who have faith, even amid our suffering; pours out love and sustains our hope until one day we share in God's fullness. This peace comes to us through Christ, who is God's shalom, and in Christ we have constant assurance of grace. The Spirit, Paul tells us, provides the means by which we experience God's love for us.

The Romans passage today begins with, "Therefore." Therefore what? Paul is drawing a conclusion from what he has been writing up to this point. He began Romans by stating his theme (1:16-17): the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and the power of the gospel to save believers, "...the Jews first, then the Greek. For in the gospel is revealed the justice of God, which begins and ends with faith." The central issue, Paul says is a faith that through Jesus Christ is now available to Jew and Gentile. Paul begins this section of Romans with "therefore" because he is going to elaborate on the consequences of being justified by faith. He is speaking to Christians ("we") and will show how our faith in God's love and the work God has done for us in Christ will ground us in hope for the future, despite the present sufferings we endure for our beliefs.

What do we have, we who are "justified by faith?" The first consequence is peace. We believe

we are in good relationship with God, not because of anything we have done, but because of what God has done for us in Christ. This grace didn't just come once, but we have "access" to it continually. Paul helps us celebrate this feast by stirring up in us a festive mood. Because of God's work in justifying us, we can, by the gift of faith, be assured that we are at peace with God. We may not always feel or think we are, but we place our faith in Christ.

We are assured by the Holy Spirit that we enjoy divine favor and access into God's presence. It is as if we entered a castle and instead of being treated as outsiders, were immediately ushered into the royal presence as honored guests. Paul says we "stand" in grace. Reflect on that for a while: we have access to God continually because of our new status, we are standing in grace. No matter what our past, how unworthy we feel, or whether we deserve it or not, we can confidently stand before God because we have faith in Jesus.

Paul goes on to say that because of our standing in grace before God, we have hope that we will share in God's glory; that we will be fully restored from all the damage sin has done to us and one day stand before God as we were created--- in God's image and likeness. Meanwhile, in our daily struggles and as we face temptations against our very Christian identity, it doesn't always feel like we are "standing in grace." That's where faith comes in; it reassures us of God's constant forgiveness and active love and keeps the hope alive that one day God's work will be culminated, when the "glory of God" is shown in us.

All this may sound "other worldly," or "pie in the sky," except for what Paul says next. He acknowledges the "afflictions" Christians experience in this age. Taken on its own, the second half of the reading can sound like a spiritual fitness exercise: when we have suffering and endured we will develop a "proven character." But remember what Paul has been saying: it is grace and the faith it stirs up, that enable the Christian to endure afflictions and sufferings that threaten our beliefs. During these difficult times, God works overtime on our behalf to help us grow in hope and in the assurance of God's love.

In the very moment of suffering we can "boast." Why? Because we are such strong and exemplary Christians able to bear up under severe testing? Able to overcome trials of all sorts that test our faith? No. We can "boast" because God stands with us and can turn even our trials into opportunities for our spiritual benefit. Only God can do this; only the free gift of grace in which we stand can make this possible. We may not see what the end will yield, but our hope reassures us, we are and will be in safe hands. The voice of the Holy Spirit in us reminds us amid our sufferings that God's love will never abandon us, no matter how frail or unworthy of that love we feel. We are justified, made right with God, through faith.

For Paul, faith is the basis of our Christian lives. He reminds us at the beginning of Romans that to believe is to accept God's power into our lives (1: 16-17; 3:24). As a result of this acceptance, we have a whole new life and intimacy with God through Jesus. Based on this faith, we live a new life in obedience to God. Faith begins with God's free offer of an intimate relationship with us, and we respond by living a life of good works, even under duress and suffering.

We are united with a community that professes, as we do, faith in Jesus Christ. The members of this community, with the support of one another, seek to practice this faith in daily life and in our worship today. Gathered in prayer and praise we celebrate those who have handed on faith to us, our ancestors. We also rely on those who are with us today, whose faith deepens and sustains our own. The community is the sign to us of God's grace and love and so stirs up our hope and assurance that God's love will never abandon us. Who among us hasn't been through trials that have shaken us to our foundation and seemed like they would extinguish our faith? Yet, in the midst of the dark night we have found hope through other members of the community who, by their presence, phone calls, notes and spontaneous and loving outreach, have strengthened our flagging spirits.

At these moments we have known what Paul means when he describes the "love of God" that "has been poured out into our hearts." That love has taken flesh for us in others, as it took flesh in Jesus Christ and, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we have the eyes of faith and have come to believe that we are the beneficiaries of a gracious God's care. Faith has helped us see what we might otherwise have missed—"the grace in which we stand."

In this very brief passage Paul encourages faith in our triune God by helping us see God's activities on our behalf. We learn about our triune God, not so much from dogma and doctrine, but by what God's actions have revealed. The teachings and statements of faith will follow as the community reflects on what it has learned from its encounters with its God. Romans reaffirms what our Jewish ancestors came to believe: God can be trusted: to stand with us in times of need; to forgive us when we have sinned and to nourish our hope in times of pain and trial, by promising us a secure future, "...we boast in hope of the glory of God." What "proof" do we have that our hope is not groundless or wishful thinking? God has "through the Holy Spirit" sustained us and made God's love known to us in our hearts.

Both within our community and beyond we are called to be evangelizers who, through our words and actions, give witness to our gracious God whose love "has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given us." We are called to share with others what we have personally come to know. Today we celebrate the Most Holy Trinity. One way to do

that is to celebrate the life of that Trinity in each believer and to respond, with confidence, to the call to proclaim our loving God to all the world. We pray at this Eucharist that the Holy Spirit will show each of how to do that so that our church will better mirror the God we profess today.

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

I hope many of you will enjoy Anna Carter Florence's *Preaching as Testimony* as much as I have. Florence is a Presbyterian preacher from Georgia who writes about Anne Marbury Hutchinson (1591-1643), Sarah Osborn (1714–1796), and Jarena Lee (1783-?) and a long tradition of Christian preachers who preach not so much from a position of power (ordination and a pulpit) but in compelling testimony to the experience of God whom they have encountered. Florence writes, "Christian witness will always hinge on the question, Can we really say that, even though we have no proof beyond what we have seen and believed? Somewhere between the question and the answer is where Christian preaching locates itself—again and again and again." I really like Anna Carter Florence, both personally and in print. I recommend this theological reflection on preaching to ... preachers, for our compelling vocation is to preach not from places of power but from what we have seen and believed.

(Westminster John Knox Press, 2007, ISBN 0664223907)

---Gregory Heille, O.P., Professor of Homiletics and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri.

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 the 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 in: *THE NEW DICTIONARY OF SACRAMENTAL WORSHIP*, ed. Peter E. Fink, S. J. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p.1297

JUSTICE NOTES

“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)

Did you know?

The U.S. Catholic bishops are urging that any legislative action on climate change include provisions that: (1) ease the burden on poor people; (2) offer some relief for workers who may be displaced because of climate change policies; and (3) promote the development and use of alternate renewable and clean-energy resources,

What can I do?

Write to your legislators and let them know that you support action on a national level that includes the three key priorities above.

Locally, encourage lawmakers to improve and update public transportation

Participate in Earth Day celebrations to raise awareness of the challenges of global climate change.

Urge legislators to remember that poor people may suffer the most from climate change and that legislative measures should include provisions to address disproportionate economic impacts, i.e. in heating and transportation costs.

---(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, NC)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

"It is time to abandon the death penalty – not just because of what it does to those who are executed, but because of how it diminishes all of us... We ask all Catholics--pastors, catechists, educators and parishioners – to join us in rethinking this difficult issue and committing ourselves to pursuing justice without vengeance. With our Holy Father, we seek to build a society so committed to human life that it will not sanction the killing of any human person.

----- ("Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Nov. 2000,)

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...

- Lawrence E. Peterson #0320825 (On death row since 12/12/96)
- Henry L. Wallace #0422350 (1/29/97)
- Terrence Taylor #0539901 (2/18/97)

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. CD Available: "FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C." The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and PDF) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer.

To purchase go to: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the "Year C-CD" button on the left and follow the instructions.

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (FrJude@JudeOP.org)

3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/> (Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilies Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. "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](#).

DONATIONS

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Thank you and "Blessings on your preaching",
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