

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
June 4, 2023
SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY**

SCRIPTURES:

Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

John 3:16-18

Moses prays that God will remain with him.

Live together in harmony and peace.

We will be saved by believing in Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

John:

The word of God given to us in the Lectionary for the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity reminds us of the core of Christian revelation: God loves the world. So great is that love that God gives his Son, Jesus Christ; the purpose of that gift is that we might have life everlasting.

There are some strands of spirituality among Christian people that would portray God as angry and vengeful, a God who is just waiting to catch us doing wrong so that we can be severely punished. It is as if God were constantly peeking around the corner hoping to find us in some sin so that we can be appropriately punished. People are motivated by fear in this view of God. Surely, this represents a primitive and immature view of God and of us. Modern psychology has shown that people who are motivated by fear of punishment are at a less developed stage of moral maturity than those motivated by love. Christian revelation appeals to the higher levels of ethical and moral development: It is because of God's love that we are able to love in return.

Nicodemus came to Jesus *in the night*. He was not able to come in the full light of day because of fear — fear of being judged by his fellow members of the religious ruling class. He could only risk so much. It was not yet possible for him to declare himself openly as a disciple of this Teacher. He had always been motivated by fear: of God and of his fellow Israelites. But he comes, even if it is still *night* in his soul. The light of Christ has not yet penetrated to the heart where life decisions are made. He has to be careful in case this is not the one to follow!

We were still in *darkness* when we were brought to the Lord. It is only the gracious word of Jesus Christ that has brought us into the Light of God's love and of God's kingdom. God's love for us has penetrated through the darkness of sin to shine upon our inner beings so that we might be bathed in light and in love.

Using the question addressed to him by Nicodemus, Jesus enters into a long exposition of the nature and means of salvation (John 3:1-21). Moving from the physical level to the spiritual (birth and rebirth), Jesus responds to Nicodemus' query. This leader among the Pharisees came to Jesus because he was astounded at the fact of miraculous healing and other factual evidence. *Evidence of what?* He really needed to know what the meaning of all these works was about. *The Gospel in a nutshell: God loves; God sends Jesus; God saves through Jesus.*

Finally, responsibility rests with us. We need only believe! We need only make the *leap of faith*. We have to move from the darkness we were in, into the realm of light where salvation is to be found. It cannot be forced upon us. It is there for us to surrender into. Jesus Christ is there to be accepted and loved.

It is hard for us to deal with the ancient Semitic ways of expressing the fate of those who do not choose to follow Christ: *condemnation*. The way we read it is that we are condemned for not having chosen. The fact of the matter is that we are already in a state of alienation or of

condemnation from which we can be rescued by the love of Jesus Christ. It is not God who condemns us. It is our own sinful condition that has *tracked* us toward an eternity where God is absent. The love of God in Christ is necessary for that track to be reversed.

God primarily intends to save us (Ezekiel 18:32). Only our refusal now stands in the way. We need to turn away from God's saving love in order to be *condemned*. The love of God has priority in our lives. For us to lose it, we must refuse it.

Exodus:

After the people of Israel had so soon violated their new Covenant with God at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moses called upon the Lord to renew and to restore that Covenant. The people recommit themselves to the Lord and promise to be as faithful as God is faithful! The Lord now further identifies himself: "The Lord, the Lord ... merciful ... gracious ... slow to anger ... steadfast in love and faithfulness." This self-definition on God's part became a slogan or a short creed for the people of Israel and remains so for us.

2 Corinthians:

On Trinity Sunday, we use the concluding verses from the Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians because it ends with this Trinitarian formula. We have become familiar with this passage now used as a greeting at the beginning of the eucharistic liturgy. Christ has been given to us as a *grace*, an unmerited gift. The Father *loves* us with love unequalled. The Holy Spirit binds us in intimate *communion* with God and with one another. This greeting needs to be on our lips day in and day out.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever experienced the love of God in Jesus Christ as you were at prayer or in the liturgy of the Church? Could you sense that Jesus the Christ was there imparting the love of God through the power of the Holy Spirit? What was that like? Can you share with others some of that experience?
2. Do you know what *grace* is? Do you know that you have been *gifted* by God with love and with spiritual power to do good things? Give some account of the gifts that God has given you for spiritual works. Are you aware that God's love is a gift? That it cannot be earned? That Jesus Christ is the giver of divine gifts along with the Father? That the Holy Spirit is the gift of God to us?
3. Discuss the various ways in which you experience your family as God's gift to you — your family of origin and your present family. Discuss the ways in which your faith community is God's gift to you. Discuss the ways in which you yourself are a gift of God to others in family life and in the community of faith.

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

During the week to come, take a look at your family and at your faith community as an expression of the Trinity in human relationships. Get into the habit of seeing human relationships as "sacraments" or "signs" of the divine relationships.

PRAYER

**God, we praise you:
Father all-powerful,
Christ Lord and Savior,
Spirit of love.
You reveal yourself in the depth of our being,
drawing us to share in your life and your love.
One God, three Persons, be near to the people formed in your image.
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

(Alternative Opening Prayer: Trinity Sunday)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

For almost 2,000 years, Christians have struggled with the doctrines that set into words what their faith commitment has experienced as God. “Father, Son and Spirit: One God.” When we approach the divine presence in the Risen Christ, we become aware that we are in the presence of a vast complex of relationships that share in the God-Being. It is not just a matter of encountering “God,” pure and simple. Our “God” comes to us as “Three Divine Persons” without being multiplied into three gods. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit come to us in our different experiences of divine encounter, without differentiating into separate beings which would be Three Gods. Thus, we have the experience of Three Persons in One God.

Were it not for Christian revelation in Jesus Christ, we would not have known about the Trinity. “The Word was God The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” in Jesus Christ the Lord, both God and human. The Risen Christ imparts the Holy Spirit as gift from himself and from God the Father. The Gospel of John especially stands as the strongest witness to the faith of the Church in a God who is Father, Son, and Spirit.

In our everyday experience of the divine presence, we become convinced that the Three Persons are indeed communications of the One God. We encounter Jesus Christ the Risen Lord in a faith experience that the Holy Spirit communicates to us. Were this not so, we would merely know Jesus as a historical person who lived and died a long time ago. This very Jesus who lived and died a long time ago indeed lives today through the power of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith that bears his name. The Spirit continues to communicate the presence of the Living Lord to all who have been called to give witness to the resurrection. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church, as body of Christ, raises its voice in praise of the heavenly Father, who is the Father of Christ and our Father.

Even if we have no formal knowledge of all the complex doctrines that the Church teaches concerning the Trinity, we still experience God as Trinity whenever we experience Jesus Christ in our midst. This experience comes to us in at least two ways: prayer and community. In our deepest prayer, we come to know, from God’s revelation of self to us, that God is Three Persons. In our profound experience of community, a God who is three in divine relationships becomes the model for our relationships with one another in this world and in the next. We are destined to be in community, to be with one another in love relationships. Men and women were not meant to stand alone in personal and individual isolation because the God who made us and who loves us is a God of profound and essential relationships called persons. People who were made by a God who is Three Persons must be like the God who is their maker: naturally called to be in love with one another and with God.