

Homily-HolyTrinity08

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. This Feast offers us the opportunity to reflect on the question, "Who is God for you?" This Feast reminds us the God whom we acknowledge and worship is "for us, and has entered a personal relationship with each of us both individually and communally.

Our tradition helps us to answer who God is. We believe that God is one God in three persons. The Scriptures speak to us of how God relates to us and how we relate to God. The God who is presented in the Scriptures is always presented as a God who is personal, relational and experiential.

What is your image of God?

There are various images of God that are presented in the Hebrew Scriptures which I find to be compelling. The first is the God of the covenant. The God of the Hebrew Scriptures is shown to be in a committed relationship of love with his people. God is shown to never turn from his people although his people often turn from God. Our God is a God who is committed to us and who never turns from us. This covenantal love of God is clearly shown in the image of God as Spouse. The prophet Hosea presents God as a God who is married to his People. Hosea shows God as being faithful to his People and his People as turning away from God. Isaiah uses this same image as he writes to the people of the kingdom of Judah after the Babylonian Exile. Isaiah writes, "As a young man marries a virgin, your builder shall marry you. And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you (Isaiah 62:5)." "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fit and strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

The care of God for his People is shown in the image of God is the Shepherd of his People. The image presents the religious and political leadership of God's People as being corrupt and caring little for the people. God is presented as the true Shepherd of His People who cares for their needs and protects them.

A third image of God is God as Savior. This image is presented in two places in the Hebrew Scriptures. God is first shown to be Savior when God frees His People from slavery in Egypt and leads them across the desert to the freedom of the Promised Land. In this image God is a God who frees His People and feeds them as journey to safety. This image is very clear as well when God frees His People from Exile in Babylon and leads them across the desert back to their homeland. God is shown to have a special love and care for His People. God is not uninvolved in the lives of His People.

New Testament

The New Testament offers us various images which help us to understand the love and power of God.

The story of the Prodigal Son is one of the most powerful of those images of God. In the story of the Prodigal Son God is presented as a Forgiving Father. In the story the younger son asks for his inheritance and leaves for a distant land. The son squanders his inheritance on dissolute living. Once he has lost everything and comes to his senses he decides to return to his Father. The Father has been out on the road eagerly waiting for his son to return. The son begins to apologize and the Father immediately embraces his son and calls for a feast in order to celebrate the return of his son. We are to imagine that our Father is constantly waiting for us to return to Him. We are to know that God celebrates when we come back to Him.

A second New Testament image that gets to the heart of God's nature is that God is love. St. John gives us this image that in a concise way gives us the best image of who God is. The God of the Gospel of Matthew is a God who is kind to the grateful and the ungrateful and who calls us to live in the same way. Just as God is merciful we are called to be merciful. We are to love our enemies because that is the way God loves.

Our second reading presents us with a description of our God as a triune God. This is the verse that we normally use as the greeting at the beginning of Mass. I will include in my homily a reflection about the meaning of this verse from the writing of Daniel Harrington.

1. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...* The word grace in a theological context refers to divine favor. "In Christ God has shown favor to us Christians, a special care for us and a desire that through Jesus' life, death and resurrection we might find and enjoy the right relationship with God. Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh is proof of God's care for us. This has been captured most memorably in the words of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life." Christ is God's gift to us, the ultimate sign of God's favor, God's grace incarnate. How we respond to that grace is our gift to God.
2. *And the love of God...* God's love for us always comes first. Everyday God's love comes first. Our love for God is only a fitting response to God's love for us. Exodus 34 describes God, the Lord is "a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity." Every part of that statement stresses that God is in relationship with us and it emphasizes especially God's great love for us. This is no distant or impersonal God. This is a God who loves us with a mother's love, as the Hebrew word translated "merciful" (derived from the Hebrew word for womb) suggests. This is a God who shows infinite patience with us, enters our lives, acts within our history, forgives our sins and works for our salvation. The reading continues by speaking of God's justice. This is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. *And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit...* On Pentecost we celebrated the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles 50 days after Easter and the abiding presence of the Spirit in the church throughout the history and today. We live our Christian lives in the fellowship or *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit.

For me one of the most powerful images of God is God as Trinity. In this image God is presented as an unconditional love. God is presented as a relationship of love which has existed from all eternity. Augustine said that God loves because this is God's nature not because creation deserves love. The parables of the Gospels reveal a God who is perfectly self-giving. God is the name of a relationship of an endless perfect mutual self-gift. The Father totally gives himself to the Son, the Son totally gives himself to the Father and the Spirit proceeding from both, is the bond of that pure love.

Early Church fathers described God as Lover, Beloved, and the Love that they share. God is the name of the relationship and the Persons who participate in that relationship. God is not merely a person. God is the very fullness of relatedness. **For God to be and to love are synonymous.**

The focus on the Trinity is on God as being a community of love. At the same time God shares this love with us through his Son and continues this loving relationship through the Holy Spirit.

We sometimes wonder how we can understand the Trinity. We can't understand the Trinity. We can only experience the Trinity. When we experience love in marriage or prayer or in serving others we experience the love of God. God did not choose us and bring us into the world to merely experience His love. God placed us in the world to respond to His love by loving Him in return. God created us to experience His love and to love in return. We are created to share in the love of God and to share that love with others.

The unfathomable mystery of God is that God is a lover who wants to be loved. The one who created us is waiting for our response to the love that gave us our being. God not only says: "You are my Beloved." God also asks: "Do you love me?" and offers us countless chances to say "Yes." That is our spiritual life: the chance to say "Yes" to our inner truth. The spiritual life, thus understood, radically changes everything. We are to live out this call to love in all aspects of our life. Let us constantly respond to God as He relates to us.