

The Liturgy for July 5, 2020

The Question to be addressed: *Now, about the Trinity...!*

~Thought for Meditation:

When God laughs at the soul and the soul laughs back at God, the persons of the Trinity are begotten. When the Father laughs at the Son and the Son laughs back at the Father, that laughter gives pleasure, that pleasure gives joy, that joy gives love, and that love is the Holy Spirit.

Meister Eckhart, 13th C. Mystic

~GATHERING:

~LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

~CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Grace, peace and mercy of the Triune God be yours. Let's worship together.

~OPENING PRAYER ENDING WITH THE LORD'S PRAYER

Holy God, Three in One,

And one in three;

our eternal hope,

our companion in life,

our liberating power.

Be with us in our worship; in our certainty and in our muddle; in our deep caring and in our couldn't care less. And hear us now, as together we pray the words of Jesus, saying:

Our Father who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil,

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

For ever and ever. Amen.

~Scripture: John 1: 1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

~Reflection:

So Sharon Noel (Thanks Sharon!) sent in a question for us to peruse: it involves The Trinity: The Holy Trinity, variously referred to as Father Son and Holy Spirit/Holy Ghost; (traditionally, via the KJV); God/Jesus/Spirit/Creator/Redeemer/Sustainer: God who is 3 and yet 1

The hymn, #315 in your hymnbook says: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Merciful and mighty, God in 3 persons, Blessed Trinity.” We sing it, we say, it, yes, but, as Sharon says:

I can understand Jesus and the Holy Ghost but if He is also God, why was he always praying to Him? What am I missing? Probably this was covered in SS...?

Well, I suppose this has been “covered,” if you will, as in: discussed, argued over, sent people running into the streets screaming...for CENTURIES! Sunday School....maybe, church, seminaries, ancient councils...and it remains as mysterious today as it did then.

But that never stops us from talking about it...and that’s a good thing: we want to understand the things of our faith life don’t we? The trouble is, as the late Episcopalian priest Robert Farrar Capon noted:

“when human beings try to describe God, we are like a bunch of oysters trying to describe a ballerina. We simply do not have the equipment necessary to understand something so utterly beyond.”

But we try:

So we fumble our way through all the inadequate explanations we’ve heard as kids: “God is sort of like water! Water exists in three states, right? Liquid, solid, and gas? God’s like that! Or, like an egg! The shell, the eggwhite, and the yolk? Three parts, one egg! Or, um, a three-leaf clover! Or a tree! The roots, the trunk, and the branches — but they make up one tree, right? Or... or a triangle!”

One plus one plus one equals 1...are Christians not only odd, but also hopeless at math?

Now, to be clear, not all Christians believe in a triune God. Mormons and Unitarians for instance: and they have a very credible argument: The Holy Trinity is NOT biblical. Trinity does not occur in the scriptures...No where in scripture does it claim that God is one in three, or three in one. There is one line in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus says the disciples are to go forth and baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And Paul uses a blessing in his letters where he says: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* But no where is it claimed that that these 3 expressions/names/persons of God, are the ultimate identity of the Godhead.

Which is to say, the Trinity is theological doctrine. It was devised by theologians –fought over is more like it– as they tried to understand who God was for them.

So they asked questions like: How do we understand Jesus? Is he the same as God?

They wrangled over scriptural sentences like the opening of John’s gospel: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

But he was born though, the stories say, in Bethlehem to a woman named Mary: so, is he created by God, rather than the same as God? Was Jesus more human than God-like? Was he like God, but not quite the same? Or fully human *AND* fully God? And what of the Spirit, named in Genesis, who hovered over the waters “in the beginning?”

The notion of God as three...or maybe more correctly, as “plural” took shape when theologians like Basil of Caesarea, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, their sister Macrina, and their friend Gregory of Nazianzan looked at the Hebrew Scriptures. DISCLAIMER: Please note that these writers brought Christian eyes to scriptures that were part of the ancient Hebrew tradition.

What they noticed, was that in creation, in the Book of Genesis, God refers to Godself in the plural: “Let us make humankind in *our* image.” They saw that the Hebrew words for God, *Elohim* and *Adonai*, are plural nouns.

They noticed things like the song of the Seraphim in Isaiah: that the angels sang “Holy” not once but three times. They looked at Genesis and saw that when God visited Abraham and Sarah at the Oaks of Mamre God appeared in the guise of three men.

They began to see God as Trinity and how God is One but also Three, how the Three Persons interrelate in a Triune community.

As they and many others began to develop theories of God’s being, they became invested in their own points of view. Camps emerged.

And the camps met at a big theological shakedown called the Council of Nicaea. Major players:

ALEXANDER/ATHANASIUS: God is fully three and fully one; God is three persons (hypostases), but one/same essence (ousias).

ARIANS: Also heavyweights going into the battle. Their take: Son and Spirit derived their divinity from the Father, were created, and were inferior to the Godhead of the Father.

SEMI- ARIANS: asserted that the Son was “of a similar substance” (homoiousios) as the Father but not “of the same substance” (homousios)

MODALISTS: They collapsed Father, Son, and Spirit into a single being. This means that when we talk of each of the persons of the Trinity these are masks or modes that God uses to reveal himself. Sometimes God shows up as Father, sometimes as Son, sometimes as Spirit. But there is no real difference between these modes, as they are all one God.

WINNER: God is fully three and fully one; God is three persons (hypostases), but one/same essence (ousias). Thus was begun the Nicene Creed. (It had a few editions). This became the Orthodox (“right” way of thinking. Other ways were heretical.)

For all of the battling and argument; the creating of those who were in and those who were out, there is something fascinating about God as “plural.”

1. This says that somehow God is fluid and moving rather than rigid. That God is surprising and challenging and hard to pin down. God is not meant to be made small.

2. We can see that God is also diverse. If God exists in three persons, then each person has his (or her) own way of embodying and expressing goodness, beauty, love, and righteousness.

As Father Richard Rohr says it: “Goodness isn’t sameness. Goodness, to be goodness, needs contrast and tension, not perfect uniformity.”

If God can incarnate goodness through contrast and tension, then why can’t we? Why won’t we? Why do we fear difference so much when difference lies at the very heart of God?

3. Also, here is God not as a loner, but a ‘we’ God. God from the beginning is, God as community.” It’s one thing to say that God *values* community. Or thinks that community is good for us. Or hopes that we’ll build our own. It’s altogether another to say that God *is* community. That God *is* relationship, intimacy, connection, and communion.

This notion, begun so much earlier becomes beautifully manifest in an icon from the 15th Century, created by Andrei Rublev. I gifted myself with this upon my ordination, because it is called: “The Hospitality of Abraham,” also known as “The Trinity,”

~the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (depicted as the three angels who appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre), sit around a table.

~Their faces are nearly identical, but they’re dressed in different colors.
The Father wears gold,
the Son blue,
the Spirit green.

The Father gazes at the Son and the Spirit, perhaps

The Son gazes back at the Father, but gestures towards the Spirit.

The Spirit gazes at the Father, but with one hand points to the table, and the chalice on it.

As a whole, the icon exudes adoration and intimacy — clearly, the three persons around the table love and enjoy each other. But it also exudes openness. They are separate but connected.

And, note the open space at the front: There is space at the table for the viewer of the icon. For me. For you. For us. As if to say, the point of the great Three-in-One is not exclusivity — God is not a middle school clique — but rather, radical hospitality. The point of the Three is always to add one more, to extend the invitation, into relationship with God, one another and the world

If God is both plural and interactive at God's very heart — if Three is the deepest nature of the One — then what are we doing when we isolate ourselves from each other? When we decide to go it alone? When we hold ourselves back from intimacy and connection, and thus deny ourselves the expression and experience of God's own self? If the Trinity really is much more than a bit of dusty doctrine the early Church fought over, then we dare not take lightly the life-changing power of the communal. *God is Relationship*, and it is only in relationship that we experience the fullness of God.

~A Time of Prayer: written by Steve Collins (I found this prayer so moving...but I have no other info on him...I hope he writes more)

three is the magic number
calling us out of individualism
insisting on relationship
i to you
we to another
trinity seeding networks
until all the cosmos joins in

one to create
one to save
one to sustain

one to author
one to fight
one to enliven

one to conceive
one to die
one to resurrect

one to plan
one to act
one to explain

one's sufficient
two's company
three's community

trinity expose our self-reliance
trinity break open our exclusivity
trinity seed our joining tonight
amen.

~Benediction: from 2Corinthians 13: 13

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen and Amen.

Music for the Trinity:

Hymn: Holy, Holy, Holy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gepOOO9l8mc>