

The “So What” of Trinity Sunday

My favorite professor in seminary had a line. He used to talk about a time when, I think, he was presiding at the Mass, but the other priest had the homilies for that weekend. It was Trinity Sunday. And apparently the priest who had the homilies for that weekend got up and said something to the effect of, “Well, the Blessed Trinity—we really can’t know anything about that,” and then went on to preach on a completely different subject.

My professor’s point was: don’t do that.

The Trinity has a lot to tell us.

Now, I’m not going to get into a deep theological discourse on the Trinity. I could nerd out all day for you. That’s not going to be that helpful. But I’m going to focus rather on two things that every homily should have. Every homily should probably have a “so what”: how does this apply to me? And every homily should have some sort of practical challenge or takeaway for the week.

So that’s simply what I’m going to do today. It will be pretty short for this morning.

The main thing about the Trinity that you have to remember is that you are made in the image and likeness of God. You are made in the image and likeness of God—not God the Father, not God the Son, not God the Holy Spirit, but God who is Trinity.

And if you are made in the image and likeness of the Trinity, that actually has implications for how you live. A community of perfect self-giving love is what we’re called to and what we’re destined to.

In fact, the Catechism of the Church says that, in a sense, the primary effect of the eternal life that Jesus mentions in the Gospel today—the primary effect of that eternal life or salvation—is entering into the perfect unity of the Trinity.

Yes, I said that when you are saved, you enter into, in a sense, the perfect unity of the Trinity. That should kind of blow your mind, but that’s what it means to be adopted as a beloved child of God: to enter into Trinitarian relationship. That is both the reality now, if you are baptized, and the fulfilled reality we hope for in the beatific vision of heaven.

Mary, the Visitation, and Trinitarian Life

So what does this look like?

I want to take an image simply from today—not the readings, but an image from May 31. When May 31 is not a Sunday, we celebrate the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin

Mary. And on the Feast of the Visitation, we see a very Trinitarian play that kind of gives us a sense of how this is meant to play out for us.

The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and says, “You will conceive by the power,” or overshadowing, “of the Holy Spirit. You will conceive in your womb, and you will bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.”

So we already have the Holy Spirit. We have the Father’s will. We have Jesus incarnate in her womb.

Then we are told that upon hearing that Elizabeth is pregnant, the Spirit, in a sense, impels her to go in haste to the hill country, where she enters the house of Elizabeth. And when her greeting reaches Elizabeth’s ears, the infant in her womb leaps, and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit.

May 31 is a very Trinitarian day in its own way, as we celebrate the Feast of the Visitation.

So what’s the practical implication of the Visitation for us?

The Christian life, by the way, is not first about moral improvement. Now, that’s part of it, but the Christian life is not primarily about moral improvement. In fact, Mary needed no moral improvement, did she? Mary needed no moral improvement.

The primary grace there is that she has been inserted into the mystery of salvation and the history of salvation. And she has been inserted, through the One she carries in her womb, into the life of the Trinity.

That’s the primary grace. That’s a primary Christian grace. So that’s the “so what.”

Think about Mary. Mary is pregnant. Although mother and baby—their blood doesn’t mix physiologically—nonetheless, of course, there is cellular exchange. God the Son incarnate is actually exchanging cells with her. There is a unity. It’s a symbiosis, right?

And that, in fact, is a very good image of what happens here, and what happens when you receive Holy Communion. It’s a very visceral type of thing. You’re receiving the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus.

That is the primary way that you are initiated into the life of the Trinity: through the sacraments, and especially the Eucharist that we celebrate each week.

Two Practical Challenges

That’s takeaway one: don’t take this for granted.

We need, time and time again, on a regular basis, to refresh ourselves in terms of what we do when we receive Holy Communion, so that it doesn't become simply routine.

So that's the challenge for today. Be intentional. As you receive Communion, you are being inserted deeper into the life of the Trinity. That's challenge one.

Challenge two is pretty basic, but it's implied by all of this, right? The Trinity is perfect self-giving love. So there is always this question: how am I being a person of self-giving love?

The Blessed Mother has just received this incredible mystery, this incredible grace, but she doesn't sit around kind of navel-gazing—pun intended. Rather, her first impulse is to serve someone else.

So challenge one, again, is to really be present as you receive Holy Communion today, to really be thinking about what you're doing as you come forward.

And the second is to pray for the grace that this week the Holy Spirit may inspire you to reach out or respond in love to another in a way that maybe isn't routine for you.

That's the challenge.

So dear friends in Christ, as we approach this mystery, which is the Eucharist, let us pray that the graces we receive may bear fruit for us and our neighbor.

Praise be Jesus Christ.