

A story is told of Augustine who was taking his summer holiday along the seashore in North Africa. Walking along the water's edge on a delightful day, he was pondering the mystery of the Trinity. All this genius was getting for his efforts was a severe headache. Finally, he thought he was experiencing a breakthrough. He was about to shout "Eureka!" When suddenly at his feet there was a little boy about 5 years old. He had a pail in his hands and the Bishop asked him what he was doing. The boy replied, "I am pouring the whole ocean into this small hole." Augustine said, "That's silly. No one can do that." Unintimidated by the man towering over him, the child replied, "Well neither can you, Bishop Augustine, unravel the mystery of the Trinity." The child then disappeared.

The Augustinians I know love to tell that story. I think we all get the point. The Trinity will remain a mystery forever and then some.

Today, we have come to the end of the celebration of the Pascal Mystery. It began with Lent, and then the weeks of the Easter season and it ended last week with the Pentecost. Traditionally, the transition to ordinary time is commemorated by our celebration of the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

The teaching of the Trinity is one of the most fundamental in our Christian faith - we begin our prayers and celebrations by reminding ourselves of it. It is fundamental and yet it is referred to as a 'mystery', something which can be affirmed by prayer but is not to be understood and doesn't really need to be explained. We are called simply to believe it.

In the New Testament, the word 'mystery' refers mainly to some truth which God has made known to us and which we might not otherwise have discovered. The Trinity, that in God there are three Persons, really is a mystery in this sense.

The most common understanding of the word mystery in our time is found in literature, in books and movies and television programs where the mystery is something to be solved. The mysteries of Holy Scripture - especially, the Trinity and the Incarnation - are not meant to be solved.

Instead, we should try to understand as much as we can, and say as much as we can, while acknowledging we can only go so far with our limited human understanding. However, I believe we can go far enough to satisfy our hunger for the truth and to have some understanding of our God. One thing we can say right from the beginning is that we are not dealing with contradictions or trying to believe the impossible.

We are asked to believe that in the one being we call God, there are three Persons who are in the words of today's preface to the Eucharistic Prayer, "equal in majesty, undivided in splendor, yet one Lord, one God, ever to be adored."

So, we don't have to get tied up in knots trying to solve or understand this mystery. We will do far better by reading prayerfully the Scripture readings of today's Mass. Our Lord is very close.

God the Father, the Parent who gives life and nurtures it. God rejoices in this world and he delights in the children of Adam. Almighty God, the Creator, the source of all that exists - in God we live and move and have our being. God is in all of creation.

If we can speak of God as Father, then through the mystery of the Incarnation we can also speak of the only Begotten Son, God made human who lived among us. We know the Son best of all through Jesus, born of Mary in Bethlehem. The message of this revelation is purely and simply to let us know that God the Father loves each of us with an overwhelming love.

God is not concealed somehow in the humanity of Jesus, but is seen precisely in that humanity. When is Jesus most clearly revealing his Heavenly Father? In his miracles? Certainly. But surely Jesus is most clearly revealing the heart of the Father when he is at his most human.

We see the Father most clearly in Jesus in his compassion for the weak, the needy, the sinner; in forgiving the sinner and his enemies, in healing the physically and mentally sick; in his unconditional acceptance of all.

Finally, we see God as indwelling Spirit. The Spirit described in the catechism as the love that is generated between the Father and the Son. Through the Spirit we come to understand that God is indwelling in all of creation and reveals himself to us through it. Wherever there is Truth or Love or Beauty, there is God. Every act of truth and integrity, every act of love and compassion, every act of human empathy, every act of solidarity, forgiveness, acceptance justice in people is the Spirit of God working in us and through us.

When such actions appear in us, they are signs that we are open to the Spirit. In the words of the second reading, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” The Gospel teaches when the Spirit of truth comes to you, he will guide you into all the truth.

And so, the two great mysteries of our faith are the Trinity and the Incarnation. The good news for us is that we don’t have to solve them like a modern mystery story. They are combined for us in marvelous simplicity in the Sign of the Cross with its accompanying words. Let us try to remember to say this simple prayer with ever greater meaning and awareness and form the cross with care and dignity.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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