

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

Gospel Except GB & USA) John 3:16-18 God sent his Son so that through him the world might be saved.

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

‘God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God’s only Son.’

Gospel (GB) John 3:16-18 ‘God sent his Son in order that the world might be saved through him.’

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Gospel (USA) John 3:16–18 God sent his son that the world might be saved through him.

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HOMILIES (6)

(i) Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

I was preparing a funeral Mass with the bereaved family recently for a woman who had lived to a good old age. Her daughter said of her that she was 'slow to anger'. It was a phrase from the Jewish Scriptures. In today's first reading, the Lord God proclaims himself to be a 'God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness'. That portrayal of God corresponds to who Jesus revealed God to be, through his life, death and resurrection. In all that Jesus said and did, he revealed God to be a God of tenderness, and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness'. The first letter of Saint John expresses this truth even more succinctly, 'God is love', and in the blessing at the end of our second reading, Saint Paul speaks of 'the love of God'.

When we speak of God as Trinity, we are saying that the inner life of God is a life of love, a life of loving relationships. Like all true love, the love within God is not closed in on itself. It is a love that seeks to embrace all of humanity and all of creation. This is the message of today's gospel reading. 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life'. The gospel reading doesn't just speak of God's love for a particular people, but of God's love for the world, for all humanity, the whole created world. God looks upon the world as one entity, all of which he passionately loves. The recent journey of astronauts towards the moon has helped us to see once again the essential oneness of the world. There, shimmering in the darkness of space, is this wonderfully coloured planet, on which we all live, regardless of race, colour or creed. This is the world that the love within God embraces. God expressed his love for this world by coming among us as a human being, in the person of Jesus from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. God loved this world so much that he gave his only Son to us all. Saint Paul in the blessing at the end of today's second reading speaks of 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ'. God graced us, gifted us, with the Lord Jesus Christ. God thereby showed himself to be God with us and God for us in love. Jesus was the fullest revelation possible of God's love for the world. God came among us, drew close to us, through

Jesus so as to draw us into God's own life, which is a life of love, a love that endures, a love over which death has no power, a life that is eternal.

To draw us into God's life of love, eternal life, God not only sent us his Son, God also sent us the Holy Spirit through his Son. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the love between God and his Son. The Holy Spirit is both the Spirit of God and of Jesus; it is the Spirit of their love for one another. Jesus came among us to pour this divine love into our lives. Saint Paul expresses this wonderful truth very simply in one of his letters, 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us'. If Jesus shows God to be God with us and God for us, the Holy Spirit shows God to be God within us. The more we open ourselves up to the gift of the Holy Spirit and the more we are filled with this Spirit of God's love, the more we will be drawn into God's own life, which is a life of love. Because the love within God is not closed in on itself but is a love for the world, the Holy Spirit of God's love in our lives will inspire us with a love for the world. The Spirit of God's love within us is a love that embraces all humanity and all creation. This Spirit of God's love will move us to draw people together. It will inspire us to be bridge builders and peacemakers, builders of communities that are characterized by great diversity, where everyone is treated with equal dignity and respect. That is why, in the blessing at the end of today's second reading, Saint Paul refers to the fellowship or the communion of the Holy Spirit.

God's love poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit creates communion. This is a vital task in an increasingly divided world. The life of God is a communion of love and God desires humanity to be a communion of love, a reflection of God's life. That is why God sent his Son and, through him, the Holy Spirit into our world. The life within God, the life of the Trinity, is reflected where families work together to overcome divisions and misunderstandings, where nations come together to resolve conflict through respectful dialogue and diplomacy. The life of the Trinity is reflected where people in our parishes give of themselves to bring together in community those who would otherwise live isolated and lonely lives. Today's feast is not just about God. It is very much about ourselves and how we are all called to live.

And/Or

(ii) Solemnity of The Most Holy Trinity

There have been eight murders in Dublin in recent weeks. The taking of another person's life is no longer the taboo it once was. We have become accustomed to hearing about the taking of human life on a more vicious scale in places like Iraq and elsewhere. In recent weeks we have been celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the ending of the Second World War. The scale of the loss of life in that war is almost more than our minds can take in. What a very different world it would be if individuals and nations committed themselves to never taking the human life of another under any circumstances.

The taking of a human life is only the most extreme form of eliminating another human being. There are less extreme expressions of that tendency to eliminate others, as when we try to exclude others in some way. Whole communities can exclude other communities with the result that one group within a society can be made to feel like second class citizens. Society can be structured in such a way that large sections of the population can be have very restricted access to what others take for granted. There are areas of our own city, for example, where young people are very poorly represented in third level colleges, if at all. As individuals we can exclude people from our lives for a whole variety of reasons. When we are angry with people we tend to cut them off. When we perceive them as some kind of a threat to us we work to keep them at arms length.

Jesus took a strong stance against any form of eliminating others. He not only reiterated the fourth commandment, 'You shall not kill', but he went further and called on his followers not to be angry with another. He rebuked the disciple who drew a sword at the moment of his arrest, telling him to 'put your sword back in its place'. He ignored his disciples when in their anger they suggested that they command fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans who had just rejected Jesus. Jesus came not to eliminate or exclude others but to gather them together, to form a new community. The fullest expression of this new human community is what Jesus referred to as the kingdom of God. He had a vision of people coming from east and west, from north and south, to eat together in the kingdom of God. Everything he said

and did was shaped by this vision. The tensions between north and south, east and west in our own world suggest that this vision of Jesus has yet to be realized.

Jesus had this vision of a new human community because he understood more than any of us could that God was a community of life. That is what we mean when we speak of God as Trinity. Even though the term Blessed Trinity is not to be found in the New Testament, the essence of that central teaching of the church is to be found there. In today's second reading, Paul wishes the church in Corinth the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Here we find Paul placing God the Father, Jesus the Lord and the Holy Spirit on the same level, as if they were. Reflecting on all the writings of the New Testament, the church would very soon come to state that the Father is God, Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God. The reverse is not true. It is not the case simply that God is Father, or that God is Son or that God is Holy Spirit. Rather, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, within God there is a series of loving relationships; the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, and the fruit of that loving relationship is the Holy Spirit who is loved by both. So great is this love within God that it has overflowed to embrace us all. As John says in today's gospel reading, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son'. We can add to that and say that God and God's Son so loved the world that they both gave the Holy Spirit. No community worthy of the name is closed in on itself. The Trinity as the perfect community imaginable is certainly not closed in on itself. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit move towards us to draw us into their wonderful community.

However, we cannot be in communion with the Trinity unless we are striving to be in communion with each other. Jesus who revealed God to us as Trinity calls us to form the kinds of communities that are, to some extent at least, a reflection of the community that is God. That is why the mission of the church in the world is to build community. The mission of each of us as members of the church is to do the same. At its best, a parish is a community of communities. Most of our parishes are too big to have a sense of the parish as a community. However, within any parish there is scope for a number of smaller communities that are linked together. These small communities can take the form of prayer groups, pastoral care groups, justice and

peace groups, liturgy groups and so on. They might consist in gatherings of people who share a common interest or who are of a similar age range. In our own parish, many people are giving of their time and energy to make sure that such communities, such gatherings, happen. Today's feast of the Trinity is a good day to commit ourselves afresh to this work of forming communities within our parish that reflect the communal life that is God.

And/Or

(iii) Solemnity of The Most Holy Trinity

Probably one of the first things we were taught about our faith was how to bless ourselves. We were taught to touch our head when we said, 'in the name of the Father', our heart when we said 'and of the Son' and our shoulders when we said 'and of the Holy Spirit'. Many of us of a certain generation were taught to bless ourselves when we passed a church. That was something I was taught as a child and always did. In the course of my studies for priesthood, after my four years in Clonliffe College, I was asked to go to Rome, to study theology. I remember my first week there I was being show around the city by one of the more senior students. Every time I came to a church I blessed myself. He quickly put me straight by telling me that if I blessed myself every time I passed a church in Rome I would be blessing myself all day because there are so many churches there.

Whenever we bless ourselves we are making an act of faith in the Trinity, in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From a very early age we are taught to make that act of faith in the Trinity by blessing ourselves. Most Catholics no longer bless themselves passing a church, but many still bless themselves coming into a church. They place their hand in the Holy Water font and bless themselves. There is something very appropriate about that particular gesture. It links back very clearly to the moment of our baptism. We were all baptized with water in the name of the Trinity, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we take blessed water and bless ourselves in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are renewing our baptism in a very simple but very significant way. There was a time when most houses had a holy water

font on the wall beside the hall door. When people left their house, they placed their hand or finger in the font and blessed themselves with the blest water in the name of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Once again that was a very simple gesture which put people in touch with their baptism. Although people may not have thought of it in that way, it was a real act of baptismal renewal as they left the house and headed out about their daily business, whether it was going to work or to the shops or to some kind of recreational activity. It can be tempting to make light of those forms of ritual as if they belonged to another era. However, properly understood, that particular ritual can continue to have great significance. It is a daily reminder of our baptism and all it entails; it brings to our minds in the context of our daily lives that faith in the Trinity which defines us as Christians. No other world religion conceives of God in this way, as Father, Son and Spirit. That way of understanding God has been at the centre of the church's faith from the very beginning. We find it there in today's first reading which is the conclusion of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, written about twenty five years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The greeting or blessing that Paul extends to the church in Corinth has become very well known to us because it is one of the greetings used at the beginning of Mass, 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all'. It might be worthwhile reflecting a little more fully on that greeting.

Paul speaks of the love of God the Father. In the words of the first letter of Saint John, 'God is love'. That fundamental insight into God which we are given in the New Testament is anticipated at times in the Old Testament. We find one example of that in this morning's first reading which speaks of God as a 'God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness'. Paul also speaks of 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ'; we could express that as the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was God's greatest gift to us; he is the greatest expression of God's love. In the words of this morning's gospel reading, 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son'. In raising his Son from the dead, God showed that he continued to give this most precious gift to the world, even when that gift had been rejected. Jesus reveals God to be a gracious God, a God of grace, who delights in giving. Finally, Paul speaks of the 'communion of the Holy Spirit'. God not only gave us his Son but,

together God the Father and God the Son have poured and continue to pour the Holy Spirit into our hearts, and the fruit of that Spirit in our lives is love, that divine-like love, which is capable of building communion between peoples of the greatest diversity. The Trinity speaks of the movement of God towards us in love, so that a communion of love may be created among us, a communion that is a real reflection of the love at the heart of the Trinity.

And/Or

(iv) Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

There is a story told about Saint Augustine who was strolling along the seashore, struggling to understand the mystery of the Trinity. He encountered a youngster with a little bucket. The boy moved back and forth, emptying bucket after bucket of seawater into a hole he had dug in the sand, a short distance back from the shoreline. When Augustine asked him what he was doing, the boy replied that he was trying to put the ocean into the hole he had dug in the sand. When Augustine told him that was impossible, the boy responded that it was just as impossible for you to comprehend the mystery of the Trinity. There was a wisdom in that reply of the young lad that Augustine, the great theologian of the church, appreciated. I come across a statement recently that appealed to me, 'the Trinity is no so much a mystery that puzzles but a fascination that captures our imagination'. Today's feast speaks as much to our imagination as to our intellect. How does the word 'Trinity' help us to imagine the life of God?

I find it helpful to imagine the Trinity as a dynamic interacting community of love. Some of the early theologians of the church, especially in the East, used a word to speak of the Trinity which means a 'going around'. It suggests a vigorous dance like movement within God, with Father, Son and Spirit, circling, interweaving, in vibrant interaction with one another. This dance of love is an open dance, drawing all of us right into the energetic flow of divine love. It is an image which might help to give us a feel for what we mean when we speak of God as the Blessed Trinity. When we speak of God as Trinity, we are speaking of God as love, reaching out to embrace us all. God's

inner life of love finds various outward expressions so as to draw us all in. The fullest outward expression of the love that is within God is the person of Jesus. He is God's love outwardly expressed towards us fully so as to draw us into a loving relationship with God. That is the message of today's gospel reading, especially that memorable verse, 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. Jesus is the human expression of the love within God, sent to us so that we might have eternal life, a sharing in the life of the Trinity. When we hear the term 'eternal life' we tend immediately to think of life after death. However, 'eternal life' is the loving life of the Trinity, and God desires us to be drawn into that life here and now, in the course of our earthly lives. If the Trinity is a mystery, it is a mystery of love, a love that needs to express itself in a human body, the body of Jesus, so as to draw us all into the love that is the life of God.

A further outward expression of the life of love that is within God is the Holy Spirit. If God sent his Son into the world, God the Father and the Son sent the Spirit into the world. It is the Holy Spirit that allows the love that is within God to enter deeply into our own inner being. Saint Paul expressed that very succinctly in his letter to the Romans when he said, 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us'. Through the Holy Spirit, the very life of God, which is a life of love, can come to reside deep within each one of us. As we open ourselves to this life of love, the life of the Spirit, we become loving people, we become people who create communion with others. In today's second reading, Paul wishes his church the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. The love of God finds outward expression in both the grace or gift of Jesus and in the gift of the Holy Spirit who creates a communion of love among us. The communion of love that the Holy Spirit creates is a reflection of the communion of love that is God. The role of the Holy Spirit is to empower us to live in ways that reflect the dynamic community of love that is God and that we call Trinity.

It has been said that the challenge this feast puts before us is not so much one of understanding but one of acceptance. We are being asked to accept God's movement towards us in love. We are invited to believe in God's tender working in our lives.

Today's feast reminds us that the primary movement is of God towards us, rather than the reverse. God's movement towards us in love is always a given; it does not depend on how good we are or how well we are living. In the first reading, Moses speaks of the people of Israel as a 'headstrong people', whose faults and sins need forgiveness; they had just been worshipping a golden calf. Yet, it is towards this people that God proclaims his identity as a 'God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness'. Those marvellous qualities are the outward expression of the God's inner dynamic of love. The word 'tenderness' there comes from the Hebrew word for 'womb'. It is a strong feminine word. We are being reminded that the love within God is beyond gender. It is a love of which even the very best of male and female love is but a pale reflection.

And/Or

(v) Solemnity of Most Holy Trinity

Long before we were taught the traditional prayers of the Our Father and the Holy Mary, we were probably taught to bless ourselves in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, touching our head, our heart and our shoulders. We were introduced to God as Trinity at a very young age. Whenever we bless ourselves, we are expressing our faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When I go into the junior classes in the local primary school, they may not have been taught the Our Father or the Hail Mary yet, but they all know how to bless themselves. There is something appropriate about learning to bless ourselves so early in life, because as babies we were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Making the sign of the cross over ourselves while expressing our faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is a very ancient custom in the church. It was one of the ways that Christians recognized one another in the early centuries when Christians had to keep a low profile or risk persecution and death. It remains a form of recognition among Christians today. When you see someone bless themselves, you recognize them as people of faith. It can be a very powerful and courageous, statement of faith in these days when the public expression of faith is often frowned upon.

In the time of Jesus and for centuries before him, the Jewish people believed very strongly that there was only one God. The peoples round about them believed in many gods. It was expressed very succinctly in a verse from the Book of Deuteronomy, 'The Lord our God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might'. There is a wonderful description of this one God in today's first reading, 'Lord, Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness'. Jesus, a Jew, shared this Jewish conviction that there was only one God. Jesus came to reveal this God more fully. He was able to reveal God fully to us because he himself had a uniquely intimate relationship with God. When he prayed to God, he called on God as 'Abba, Father'. Jesus was the unique Son of God. The first believers soon came to appreciate that Jesus was God in human form. To see Jesus was to see God. To listen to Jesus was to listen to God. According to today's gospel reading, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. In sending Jesus into our world, God gave us the greatest gift he could possibly give us, because God was coming among us through Jesus. Jesus is Emmanuel, God-with-us. This showed God's great love for the world. In today's second reading, written only about twenty five years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul finishes off his letter to the church in Corinth with the blessing, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and fellowship (or communion) of the Holy Spirit be with you all'. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ and this gift was the fullest expression of the love of God for the world. Very soon, the early church came to realize that we need to speak about God the Father and God the Son. There is one God, but within God there is a relationship of love between the Father and the Son.

In that very ancient blessing, Saint Paul doesn't just speak about the love of God the Father and the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, he also speaks about the communion of the Holy Spirit. The Jewish people often spoke about the Spirit of God. God was present to his people in and through his Holy Spirit. The first believers came to see that this Spirit of God completely filled the life of Jesus. He was full of God's Spirit, to such an extent that the Spirit of God was now recognized as the Spirit of Jesus. Just as God gave the Holy Spirit to people, Jesus could give the Holy Spirit to people.

Together they could pour the Holy Spirit into our lives. In time the early church came to see that the Holy Spirit had such a close relationship with God the Father and God the Son that the Holy Spirit could also be spoken of as God. This Holy Spirit was the Spirit of the love that God the Father and the Son had for one another. It was the love within God that was being poured into our lives through the Holy Spirit. That is why Paul speaks of the communion of the Holy Spirit. God pours the Holy Spirit into our lives so that we can love one another as God the Father and God the Son love us, and in that way create communion among ourselves. To speak of God as Trinity is to say that there is a communion of love within God. We are given the Holy Spirit to empower us to build communities that reflect the communal life of God. We do that in our families, our neighbourhoods, our cities, our world. That is the calling of today's feast.

And/Or

(vi) Solemnity of Most Holy Trinity

We find it difficult to speak about God as Trinity or to grasp its full meaning and, yet, we express our faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, every time we bless ourselves. The sign of the cross that we make is a profound statement that we belong to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is a very short prayer to the Trinity that we all learned as children and that we often pray, such as when we recite the Rosary, 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit'. You may have noticed that many of the official prayers of the church are addressed to God the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is so much a part of our prayer, and how we pray reflects what we believe.

Belief in the Trinity was at the heart of early Irish Christianity. There is an ancient Irish prayer, often associated with Saint Patrick, called Saint Patrick's breastplate. The word 'breastplate' suggests the military image of armour for self-protection. Saint Patrick's breastplate is an early Irish prayer for protection against troubles and dangers of various sorts. The prayer begins, 'I rise today, with a mighty strength, an invocation of the Trinity, believing in the threeness, confessing the oneness, of the creator of creation'. Long before even that ancient Irish prayer, Saint Paul, writing to

the church in Corinth about twenty five years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, expresses his faith in the Trinity in his concluding blessing, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all'. That blessing of Saint Paul has made its way into the text of the Mass.

It has been said that the Trinity is not so much a puzzle to be solved as a mystery to be contemplated and celebrated. When we express our faith in God as Trinity, we are celebrating the good news that the life of God is a community life. At the heart of God is a communion of love, a mutual giving and receiving of love. In the gospel reading, Jesus declares, 'Everything the Father has is mine'. God the Father has given everything to the Son in love and the Son has received everything from the Father in love. This loving communion between the Father and Son is not closed in on itself but is open to all humanity. If the Son received everything from the Father, it was with a view to giving everything he received from God to humanity, to all of us. God send his Son into the world to pour out the love between them upon all of us. This was the whole purpose of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

When Jesus was put to death because of his love for his heavenly Father, and God raised Jesus from the dead out of love for his Son, the Father and the Son together sent the Spirit of their love upon the disciples, the Holy Spirit. That Spirit has been poured out upon each one of us. As Saint Paul says in today's second reading, 'the love of God (the love between the Father and the Son) has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given us'. In sending the Spirit of their love into our hearts, the Father and the Son show that they want to draw us into their communion of love. It has been said that the deepest meaning of the Trinity is 'God is for us'. To speak of God as Trinity is to speak of God's movement of love towards us, so as to draw us into their communal life of love.

It is only in eternal life that we will be fully drawn into that communal life of God's love. Saint Paul in today's second reading speaks of 'looking forward to God's glory'. Yet, here and now, in the course of our earthly life, we can open ourselves up to God's movement of love towards us and we can allow ourselves to be drawn into God's communal life of love. That is our calling since our baptism. God wishes to draw us

into this communal life of love so that we can be empowered to build communities of love that, in some way, reflect the life of the Trinity, the life that is within God. The feast of the Trinity not only speaks to us about who God is but also speaks to us about our God-given mission in life. If God is for us, our calling is to show ourselves to be for God, and we do this by allowing God to work in our lives to create loving communities where all are treated with equal respect and dignity, where the weakest and most vulnerable among us are cared for and helped to live fully human lives. In various ways that is happening among us, in our families, in our neighbourhoods, in our parish communities, in our towns and cities. This work of building community is truly God's work, and whenever or wherever it happens the light of God's love shines more brightly in our world.

Fr. Martin Hogan.

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