

Trinity Sunday

Year A

May 22, 2005

Genesis 1:1—2:3
II Corinthians 13:5-14

Canticle 13
St. Matthew 28:16-20

In the name of the God the Creator, Jesus the Liberator, and the Holy Spirit the Sustainer. AMEN.

For the past few years, I have avoided a sermon on Trinity Sunday. It has always fallen on Br. Emmanuel's preaching rotation. In fact, just last week he was bemoaning having to preach on this occasion again until I pointed out that it was my turn finally this year. That seemed to cheer him up considerably!

And I can understand his quandary. After all, how much can you truly say and be eloquent at the same time when talking about the Trinity? The church has struggled with the meaning and implications of the Trinity for a very long time. The first problem with the Trinity is that the Bible never mentions it. The second problem with the Trinity is that to human understanding it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. We know from math that three and one cannot be the same. And yet we know that the Trinity is three and one at the same time. Three parts of the god-

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head yet one. It is one of those brain teasers I can never get my mind wrapped around.

Some of you may recognize this passage of scripture (with a few editorial changes): Jesus said, "Who do men say that I am?" And his disciples said, "Some say that you are John the Baptist returned from the dead; others say Elias, or another of the old prophets." And Jesus answered and said, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Logos, existing in the Father as His rationality and then, by an act of His will, being generated, in consideration of the various functions by which God is related to His creation, but only on the fact that Scripture speaks of a Father, and a Son and a Holy Spirit, each member of the Trinity being coequal with every other member, and each acting inseparably with and interpenetrating every other member, with only an economic subordination within God, but causing no division which would make the substance no longer simple." And Jesus answering, said, "What?"¹

¹ Synthesis, Trinity Sunday, May 22, 2005.

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I think the point I'm trying to make is that with some doctrines, such as that of the Trinity, human words or even thoughts are insufficient to clearly express what exactly it is. And that is not the same as saying it does not exist. I find myself in league with Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart when dealing with pornography. When found at a loss for words adequate to definite it, he said "I know it when I see it." I feel that way about the Trinity today. Words fail me to explain it to you, but I know it to be true.

And so I have decided to retire from Trinitarian explanations. The egg, the states of water, interlinked circles; they all provide only a shadowy peek into the mystery.

What we do find in Scripture is clear. In the story today from Genesis we see God the creator. This creator speaks the world and all that is in it into existence. Paul's letter to the Corinthians speaks of the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy

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Spirit. And in the Gospel reading we hear the commandment of baptizing in the Trinitarian formula.

But in none of these passages is the Trinity explained. We see it clearly referenced, but no details. The only conclusion I can draw from this is that it was not particularly important to the apostolic church. Not the doctrine being important, mind you, but a detailed explanation of the doctrine. And perhaps there is a lesson here for us. Sometimes mystery is best left as mystery.

You have only to turn to page 864 of the Book of Common Prayer to see the wisdom of leaving mystery a mystery. There we find the Creed of St. Athanasius. Now St. Athanasius was one of the early church fathers and one of the leaders in the fight against Arianism which was a belief that Jesus was not divine. He wrote this creed to defend both the divinity of Jesus and the doctrine of the Trinity since they are dependent upon each other. But if you ever read it I think you will draw the same conclusion as I. The Trinity is a mystery.

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To be honest that is really fine with me. I think in our current day and age one of the things we don't have nearly enough of is an appreciation for the mysteries in life.

While the Trinity is a mystery it is also very present in our lives. When a priest gives a blessing it is in the name of the Trinity and usually accompanied by the sign of the cross, another Trinitarian reference. Many of our prayers end with a Trinitarian form. Every time we cross ourselves we are reminded again of how close the mystery of the Trinity is in our daily experience. So rather than try and tease out the exact meaning of who and what the Trinity is, let us just remember it in every expression we see it in.