

Trinity Sunday-A

On this feast of the Holy Trinity we are asked to reflect on the very nature of God. **Who is God?** There is no question more important or more pressing than this.

As a believing people we talk about God all the time; we invoke God and pray to God. But **who** is God? On this Trinity Sunday we are asked in a very specific and pointed way to reflect on this very question. The Trinity is the distinctively Christian doctrine. Our belief in God separates us from secularists or, even from Buddhists. Our belief in a personal God separates us from New Age mystics and Hindus. Our belief in the Trinity separates us from Unitarians, Jews, and Muslims. It is the great defining doctrine of Christianity. What does it mean and where does it come from?

As with everything else in Christian belief, it comes ultimately from Jesus. Our Lord appeared on the scene 2000 years ago and He announced He had been sent by the Father. In and of itself this made Him more or less like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jeremiah, Elijah, any of the great heroes of Israel. **Yahweh** seemed to delight in sending representatives to speak for Him and witness to Him. It appeared that Jesus was just like John the Baptist or any of these other prophetic figures.

But clearly there was a strange something more, something different in regard to Jesus and it made all the difference in the world. Jesus did not just speak for God like the other prophets rather He spoke and acted as God; in the very person of **Yahweh**.

When Jesus said to the paralytic: *Your sins are forgiven*. The crowd immediately reacted—how can he say that—only God can forgive sins?!? Elsewhere He said: *Unless you love me more than your mother and father, you are not worthy of me*. No other prophet would have said such an arrogant thing. Jesus often used the phrase: *you have heard it said in the Torah, but I say to you*. It is the language of the Sermon on the Mount. Neither prophet nor patriarch would have dared to assume an authority over the supreme Law of **Yahweh**.

The ancient Israelites maintained a strong sense of monotheism, belief in the one God; and with it a horror of idolatry and blasphemy. Making oneself into God was about the most repugnant thing you could do. And yet, there is Jesus, sent by the Father and then at the last supper He says, the Father and I are one. So shocking and overwhelming this was to the first people who heard it.

Yet, in light of the resurrection, the first Christians realized He is who He says He is. They realized that they had to come to grips with this extraordinary identity of Jesus. Somehow this Jesus was Son of God; which is to say both **Sent** and **Divine**. He was other than the Father, otherwise the Father could not have sent Him, but at the same time, He was at a same divine level as the Father.

Things became more complicated when the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. At the Last Supper, Jesus had spoken of an Advocate or a Paraclete whom He and the Father would send. And that is precisely what happened at Pentecost. At this event the Apostles were clothed with a divine power. They knew that this gift was not only of God but it was

God Himself—because it infused them with Divine Life and allowed them to share this Divine Life with others.

Therefore, there seemed to be a Father, the One who sent Jesus; then there was a Son, the One who had been sent; and finally a Holy Spirit, the One who is sent by both the Father and Son—All Three Divine, All Three: the one God of Israel. Those are the data. That is what was given to them. Now it took the Church several centuries to work its way to a clearer and fuller understanding of this mystery. How the one God of Israel is also Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There is a little phrase in the first letter of St. John: assigning to God his highest name—God is Love. Lots of religions and spiritualities would say that God loves, or that love is one of God's attributes, yet John's claim is far more radical: **God is Love; Love is the very essence of God.** And what this means is so important, listen, it means that in God there must be a lover, a beloved, and a love all so intimately joined that they make up not three realities but one reality: the One God: The Father, the lover; the Son, the beloved; and the Holy Spirit, the love that is shared by Father and Son.

This all has explained the high abstract theory of the Trinity. But there is a more down-to-earth way to express this mystery. We invoke the Trinity on a regular basis every time we bless ourselves: in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And it is done while making the sign of the cross and is by no means accidental because the cross is the moment when the unity of the three Divine Persons is on display in a most vivid way. The cross is the place where the Three Divine persons are united in a supreme act of Love for the good of us all.

In our Gospel for today we hear those most familiar words: ***God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.***

There it is, God the Father, so loved the world that He sent, not just one more emissary or prophet, but sent His only begotten Son. He sent the one He Loved with that infinite eternal love which is the Holy Spirit. He sent the Son that we might be gathered into the dynamics of the divine life of the Trinity. Where did the Father send the Son? He sent Him all the way down to get us—which means He had to send Him into time, into history, into the human condition with all of its limitations and vagaries. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us. He sent Him into a human condition that had fallen even further down into sin and into the death that flows from it. And so the Father sent Him further down into our dysfunction, into our hatred and violence, into our stupidity, injustice, and fear—all the way down into death itself. He sent Him, in a word, to the cross. And despite the distance this took the Son from the Father, it was the Holy Spirit that kept them united through it all.

God the Father out of love wanted to bring the life of the Holy Trinity into the darkest places of the earth to hunt us down; to the furthest limits we had wandered from Him to gather us in. And so, our original question is answered. Who is God? This is God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!