

Last Sunday, the Day of Pentecost, I tried to talk about God the Holy Spirit. Today, Trinity Sunday, I'm supposed to try to talk about God the Holy Trinity. It is always a daunting responsibility.

I don't believe I paid much attention to the language of the Trinity until I went to seminary to prepare for ordained ministry. That is probably pretty common. And one of the reasons I hadn't really given any thought to the Trinity is because, in Christian worship, the language is so pervasive that it is ironically invisible to our attention. Kind of like, *how does a fish notice water?*

Today in our worship, references to the "Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit" were already in the Opening Hymn, the Opening Acclamation, the Collect for Purity, the Gloria, the Collect of the Day, the Epistle, the Gospel, and you can also look for it in the Creed, the Absolution, the Eucharistic Prayer, the Blessing, and the Closing Hymn. The Trinity is carved into the floor of our church, surrounding the baptismal font. How do we then notice...*what is everywhere...*within Christian tradition?

When I did finally start to take notice in seminary, it has ever since become a recurring priority for me. The presence of the language of the Trinity in Christianity raises *so many questions*.

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*Why is it that the Trinity is so important that the first Christian words said over a person in the sacrament of baptism are the words of the Trinity?* For a baptism to be valid only two essential things are necessary—and, actually, a priest is not one of them! Any *baptized* person can *baptize* a person and then only later needs to notify a priest. In the prayer book that is called "Emergency Baptism" (p.313). But what *is* essential to any Christian baptism is...*water...*and *the naming of the Trinity*: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." That is why those words are carved around the baptismal font.

And then this also happens on the other side of life too: *Why is it that the last thing that is normally said over a person's life is the blessing of the Trinity?* "The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always."

*And why is it that in the major turning points in a Christian's sacramental life, the blessing of the Trinity is always named:* Confirmation and Weddings? There is not even any proclamation of the forgiveness of sin without the naming of the Trinity.

*How did something so unusual become so thoroughly embedded in Christian tradition?*

And it isn't like the Trinity was something that a bunch of Christian philosophers conjured up after the Bible just to make things hyper-intellectual and more complicated. When we read the New Testament the language of the Trinity is already starting to emerge—such as in the readings today. Instead of it being some kind of wily doctrinal invention, it looks a lot more like it was something that the earliest Christians were... *given...*and then the Church has spent the rest of the time trying to figure out what to do with it. Pretty soon after Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church began treating the language of the Trinity as an essential revelation from God. But why such a thing?

It has created a continuing challenge in Christian dialogue with Jews and Muslims--both of who seriously uphold the singular one-ness of God. Curiously enough, about the only religious people who have not been phased by it are Hindus who are quite familiar with naming many different manifestations of God--and yet Christianity has never seen itself as being polytheistic. Nowadays, the challenge is not just interreligious dialogue but the real challenge of talking with a growing number of people who do not identify with any religion. *How do we speak of the Trinity to them when it is increasingly clear that when Christianity names the Trinity, it is*

*not speaking of some kind of generic god but a very specific experience of God as we have come to know as “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”?* That is a challenge—and especially if we are not sure ourselves. Once again, it would seem, as in every generation, Christians too are called to rediscover the revelation of the Trinity.

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There are a lot of questions that swirl around the Trinity. And I’m not going to try to give you answers in this homily, especially in the last few minutes. The Trinity is hugely mysterious, and the more I’ve come to know, the more reverence I realize is appropriate. So I decided from the beginning of this homily that the best way I could honor the Trinity today was to ask some necessary, provocative questions.

Once again, there is another version of this homily online which does try to give a few answers, but it is just a skeleton of an answer, and so much more could be said. What is so mysterious about the Trinity is that understanding the Trinity is not *impossible*—it is just *endless*. And the work continues. [I especially recommend the book “The Divine Dance” by Richard Rohr.]

So, if something I have said has stirred up something in you about the Trinity...and if you have been able to notice its omnipresence in our worship...then that just may be enough...for now.