

"Tackling the Trinity"
+ Holy Trinity C and Confirmation Sunday +
May 30, 2010
John 16:12-15, Joshua 1:9

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen. The text for this morning's message is the Gospel for this day.

Today we have come to the final celebration of the Christian calendar: the Sunday of the Holy Trinity and we also celebrate the confirmation of a fine young man, Enny Omosowan. What is unusual about these two events is that the Sunday of the Holy Trinity is the only church celebration that is not about an event but about a doctrine – and the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible and, for that matter neither is confirmation. No, I'm not kidding you, the word Trinity which is central to Christianity and the rite of confirmation that people look at as a benchmark in the Christian life is not in the Bible!

Regarding a public confession of faith Scripture does tell us, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised Him up from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) But I don't know if you've ever noticed this – people often say things they don't mean (we call that lying) and there are times when even the things we are certain we will never doubt or "take back" are tossed aside in disbelief and broken promises. Which is why we don't tie confirmation to the strength of our personal integrity but to the integrity and promises of God – to the washing and regeneration of baptism where we can always return to claim what God has done for us – not clinging to any promise we have made, any deed we have done, any plan we have conceived to earn God's grace – because God's grace is something we must simply receive. So today this fine young man, who will confirm the baptismal vows made on his behalf and profess his faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord is going to be gifted with a promise from scripture: "I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9) Already in his young life Enny, who was born in Italy after his father and mother left Africa, has traveled far to a new home and country here in the United States. He travels on a basketball team – which is not hard to believe for a 14 year old who is already 6'4". Who knows where your dreams, great intellect and interests will lead you, Enny? But know this: the Lord your God is with you wherever you go! You can always count on God to love you, forgive you, to strengthen you as you come to Him in the Word, in prayer, at the Lord's Table, and in the fellowship of God's people. Remember, always, that you have a home among God's family wherever you go – a place, a purpose – we need you and, frankly, you need us. God intends for us to be active in each other's lives no matter how busy our life is – just think of Tammi and how she manages to find time, not only to be a wife and take care of the six of you kids, but to work full time and be a guardian to people with special needs. Your Dad, who works far away to support all of you, as well, has made it a priority for you to all have training in the Christian faith – that takes courage and determination – especially in a new culture and society.

Christians have always been in and yet outside the cultures that surround us. Our belief in the One True God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – has always been a bit “out there” for people who do not confess Jesus as Savior and Lord and believe that God raised Him up from the dead to understand. And of course the Trinity is a mystery to we who believe by faith as it is incomprehensible. Our trust and faith in a God we do not see, in a salvation that has been given to us – that we did not earn or deserve – that doesn’t involve all the little gods and wishes and good-luck charms of other religions where you constantly try to appease the gods, ward off the demons, wear special amulets or burden yourself with things that must be done – ways you must pay for and earn forgiveness to reach some higher realm – well, it sets Christians apart and is hard for people to accept. Doing nothing for salvation? That is the basis of all other world religions. So we are in - active and involved, loving and sharing, in a world that does not accept the Gospel – unless the Holy Spirit blows in and opens the door to faith.

That is why in the upcoming second portion of the church calendar (or “low season” which includes summer here in the northern hemisphere) we turn our attention from the events of Jesus' life toward learning from Jesus as He interacted with the people of His day. We learn so that we can follow His pattern, love as Jesus loved, share what Jesus shared.

But first we must do our best to “tackle the Trinity” and “take the plunge” theologically speaking, into this most intimate puzzle of the Christian faith. And in doing so, you should know that it is somewhat like hitting a piñata that will not be open except for a few stray bits of candy and insight as to what is inside until Christ returns. That is to say, the Scriptures drop these truths about God into our midst and throughout its 20 centuries of history, the church has “taken a whack” at understanding, describing and teaching about the Trinity and the mystery of God, Three in One.

The creeds of the church, particularly the Nicene Creed, was born in debate and discussion and conflict - a conflict so heated and so divisive that Emperor Constantine, himself, summoned the whole leadership of the church together in the early 300's in order to resolve an issue that threatened to tear the church apart as people were literally being imprisoned, beaten, and dying for believing Jesus was true God and true man – made of the same substance as the Father and that the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son – also made of the same “stuff of God.” The same, yet distinct, yet one.

So why go into it? Why not treat it like people usually treat conflict - ignore it, work around it and hope it goes away? The answer is obvious: Because it matters that each of us embrace and confess what the Scriptures reveal about God, Father, son and Holy Spirit even though we cannot fully understand what is said and described and find this mystery puzzling.

Speaking of the Trinity the late Cardinal Cushing of the Roman church tells of when as a young parish priest he was summoned to give comfort to a man who had collapsed. Following the custom of the church, he knelt and asked the man, “Do you believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit?” To which the nearly dead man, roused a little, opened one eye and said, “Here I am, dying - and you're asking me a riddle?”

When Jesus promised His Spirit to His dispirited disciples, he called that Spirit, the same Spirit who enters us in Holy Baptism and who lives within the Holy Scriptures, He called that Spirit, the “Spirit of

Truth" who would "guide (us) into all truth." And He does so, not all at once, but rather as a life-long guide or a constant companion as he takes "from what is Jesus" - that is His life and His teachings - and makes them known to us."

God gives us His Spirit so that as we live our lives and study His Word, the two begin to come together - they are linked into a way of life that honors God and serves humanity. Everything Paul said in today's second lesson - sufferings, perseverance, character and finally, hope that does not disappoint us is the description of a life lived under the guidance of God's Spirit and linked to the Gospel of God's Son, Jesus.

And that's all we need to know - all you need to know, Enny, as you continue your journey of faith - the faith you will publicly profess very shortly. You do not need to be able to explain the riddle of the Trinity - that is impossible. You do not need to speak of God as mystical and beyond the reach of faith - because God grants faith to know that in this mystery we are known, loved, and kept for eternity by God the Father - creating, preserving, God the Son, saving, redeeming, forgiving, and God the Spirit, calling, guiding, correcting and renewing. And that's where we're going to leave it this morning - three distinct persons, each individual, a Trinity, and yet completely one - one God, united for the sake of our salvation to lead us through this life as strong and courageous followers, not fearful or dismayed because while our promises may fail God's will not - we have been washed and cleansed with a righteousness that will see us clear on to heaven. AMEN

Now may our ever-living Creator, whom we worship as Father, Son and Spirit, keep us steadfast in faith, defend us in adversity and bring us at last into His presence.