

It's said that Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ—one of the great theological minds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—was once asked by a priest friend how he should explain the Holy Trinity when preaching. Fr. Rahner's reply was simple: *"Don't!"* The mystery we celebrate today and profess every time we make the *Sign of the Cross*, is beyond our ability to understand, much less, adequately articulated in words. And yet it is so core to who we are as Christians.

I remind us that there is no explicit mention of the Holy Trinity in the Scriptures. *Where did get this idea?* Like so many of our doctrines that we tend to take for granted today, this was a hotly contested issue for Christians of the early centuries. For them, to articulate it correctly was absolutely paramount, because virtually everything else in our faith would be built upon that. And if the foundation is wobbly, the structure built upon it would be compromised.

But in trying to understand what was expressed in the Gospels and the larger body of Sacred Scripture—that there is one God, and only one God—and yet, that Jesus spoke and acted in the person of God, forgiving sins, re-interpreting the Law of Moses, establishing a new covenant, and praying words such as, *"The Father and I are one"* (John 10:30). It's St. John, who begins his Gospel by telling us, *"In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (1:1). But also the mysterious Holy Spirit, whom Jesus gave to the apostles to give them the divine prerogative to forgive sins (John 20:23), and the new life of Baptism that was brought forth by invoking *the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19). All that suggests God in three Persons.

So the early teachers of the Church, especially Athanasius (+373) and Hilary of Poitiers (+367), believed it absolutely necessary to reconcile these truths with the truth that there is only one God. To place their stake in the dirt on this claim, they helped in drafting the Creed, almost exactly as we declare it each Sunday. In it we declare *belief in one God, the Father...belief in one Lord Jesus Christ, who is God from God, Light from Light, consubstantial with the Father....belief in the Holy Spirit, the Lord who proceeds from the Father and the Son....*

And this one God, experienced by us in three Divine Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—should not be thought of as exercising three separate missions or three distinct wills, but instead are utterly unified in it all: creating, redeeming and sanctifying. Always, where there is one, there are all three.

But it's still so hard to wrap our minds around, despite the clever analogies and symbols: such as water, one substance that can either be liquid, ice or steam; or the sun, up in the sky, manifesting itself to us in three distinct forms: heat, light and energy; or St. Patrick's (+461) use of a shamrock with its three leaves formed into one stem; St. Ignatius' (+1556) description of three musical notes that comprise a single sound as a cord. We do the best we can, realizing that it's ultimately beyond us. Yet, as St. Anselm (+1109) declared, faith seeks understanding. And furthermore, we believe God wants to be known by us.

But more than just the fact that it's abstract, I suspect too many of us don't even see it as relevant, as though if the Pope and the bishops were to announce tomorrow that we have decided to now believe there are only two divine persons..... *Well, whatever you say! Does it affect my child's tuition costs? Or my work demands? My plans for the Fourth of July weekend?*

It was St. Augustine (+430), in his book *De Trinitate*, who proposed that the Holy Trinity is not just an abstract and remote notion, pertaining only to God. His way of explaining it is that every one of us bears a reflection of the life of the Holy Trinity. What a beautiful thought: that just as within Father, Son, and Holy Spirit there is relationship, dynamism, movement, will, freedom and love—so there is within us. And we see it expressed perhaps most powerfully in the family and the life-giving capacities of mother and father. But think of the implications: If love and relationship are core to God's inner-life, and if we are to be an image of that, what does that say about our capacity to nurture love in our relationships?

So what are your relationships like? Are your motivations in them pure, or are they mixed? Do we seek to offer self-giving love, or are we preoccupied with what we stand to gain from them, riddled in our fears and insecurities? Do we reflect God's love by being peaceful, quick to forgive, slow to anger, grateful,

honesty and self-giving? Might I suggest that we should take some time this week to evaluate how we approach and nurture our key relationships: relationships with our spouses, our children, our parents, our dearest friends, our fellow parishioners.... *What do I nurture in these?*

But this doctrine also speaks to the notion of diversity among the human family. As Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct expressions of God, so we are not all the same. Even within the broad umbrella that is the Roman Catholic Church, and for that matter, this parish, there is a variety of people, skin colors, ethnicities, sociological ideologies, personalities, and spiritual expressions. We are not equally gifted either, even within a community of faith. Some are gifted in one way, and some in other ways. There is richness in this diversity and it benefits the community itself. But at the same time, I bear in mind today's second reading. St. Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth—a diverse group, experiencing spiritually harmful divisions—reminding them that they were one body, and that their unity was their greatest attribute.

And it's true for us too. I know I've said it before, but we live in a culture that holds diversity as an ultimate value. It's not. Diversity is good, but only if we hold unity above it as a value, unity that comes through Christ Jesus. In that, is true communion. It's in our collective identity, that we ultimately find our identity as individuals, and live as a truer reflection of our one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.