

## Trinity Sunday A 2020 Sermon

June 7, 2020

Since the Fourth Century, orthodox Christianity has believed in what is known as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which states that God comprises three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one Being. God is three; **and** God is One.

That this makes no logical or mathematical sense is obvious. That is likely why such children of the Enlightenment as Isaac Newton, Erasmus Darwin, and United States Presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams were Unitarians, and Thomas Jefferson believed that Unitarianism would become the predominant religion in the United States. It avoided the irrationality of the Trinity.

But Jefferson was wrong. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is **still** claimed by a majority of Christians around the world. And I firmly believe that the reason is that the Trinity explains the **truth** about God: which is that at the heart of the Godhead are distinct, diverse persons so lovingly and intimately related to each other that they are one.

Perhaps the *problem* that most of us have with the doctrine of the Trinity is that we, at least in the United States and in other Western nations, largely see our world as composed of things **separate** from ourself: dogs, trees, countries, planets, rocks, other human beings. And within categories, we make further distinctions: **this** dog is not *that* dog; an elm tree is not a maple tree; *this* nation is not *that* nation; an American is not a Russian; I am not my neighbor. As long as we view our world *primarily* from the perspective of “*this* is **separate** from *that*,” as long as we cherish our “rugged individualism” over and against who we are in *relationship* to one another – namely, members of one human family – the Trinity will forever befuddle us. For the doctrine of the Trinity tells us that at the heart of the Godhead is loving relationship between diverse Persons; a continuous outpouring and receiving of the Life of each, into and out from each, in one endless flow.

And, my friends, the crucial meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity for us is that **we** were *created* to be the same. In our passage from Genesis, we heard this: “God spoke: ‘Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature, so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.’ God created human beings; he created them godlike, reflecting God's nature.” And God’s nature is Trinitarian: a diversity of Persons so lovingly related to one another, interpenetrating one

another, pouring themselves out for each other and fully receiving the gift of each other in one unbroken flow, that they are **One**.

And scientific research into the evolution of our species says the same thing! A recent article reads, “Evolutionary biology and psychology... hold that *H. sapiens* are a ‘cooperative’ species... [P]rimatologist Frans de Waal writes that cooperativity [consists of] behaviors ‘associated with a disadvantage or cost for the actor and a benefit for the recipient.’ ...”<sup>1</sup> In other words, who we are today is a result of our evolving into a *cooperative* species, individuals willing to pay the price of giving up their own benefit for the benefit of others and of the whole.

And is this not what the New Testament teaches us? St. Paul writes to the Philippians, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look **not** to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...” (Philippians 2:3-7, NRSV) The flow of the Holy Trinity, whether in heaven or on earth, is a constant emptying and being filled.

Richard Rohr writes: “Humans are not independent substance, nor is any part of creation; it **all** exists in radical relationship—ecosystems, orbits, cycles, and circulatory systems.”<sup>2</sup>

Professor and author Marcia Pally writes that “Edith Stein, the German Jewish philosopher who became a Carmelite [nun], notes that for the persons of the Trinity, ‘I am’ is identical with ‘I am one with you’ and with ‘we are.’

“As humanity partakes of this triune God to exist at all, we partake of this distinct-persons-in-community. The [image of God] is triune. Each person, in the ‘image’ of this giving God, becomes who she distinctly is through giving and being given to.”<sup>3</sup>

Giving and being given to, in the endless flow of love within the Holy Trinity. And we, created in the image and likeness of this Trinitarian God, are meant to share in that flow through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit which has been poured out upon us and within us.

And yet, it seems that we still tend to see the world in terms of separateness rather than trinitarian oneness. Recently, we have seen this tragically pointed out to us in the death of George Floyd, a black

man who died under the knee of a white police officer. There seems to be within us white Americans an “implicit bias,” totally unconscious, which sees those with a different skin color as **separate** from us. There is only one human race, *Homo sapiens*, within which there is a large diversity of size, shape, eye color, hair color, skin color, nationality, language, culture, religion, and on and on. One cannot look out at our world and not see that God loves diversity! No snowflake is alike, nor is anyone’s fingerprints. This reflects the diversity within the Holy Trinity.

And yet, rather than reveling in the diversity of human beings, created by God on the 6<sup>th</sup> day, our tendency is to see everything – everything! – through red or blue lenses. As a Chemistry major in the 1970’s, I never would have dreamed that I would ever see **science** become a matter of partisan politics. Such is the degree of our divisiveness!

Our nation’s “motto,” for over 150 years, was unofficially “*e pluribus unum*” – out of many, one. The words are included on the Great Seal of the United States, as determined by Congress in 1784. It first appeared on United States coins in 1795, and we can still see it on our coins today.

It is a motto reflecting the diversity-in-unity of the Holy Trinity, in whose image and likeness we were created. It is a Trinitarian motto.

My friends, I pray that this worldwide pandemic may yet draw us together into the one humanity God created, reflecting the nature of the Trinity. I pray that the heartless homicide of George Floyd might awaken us to the inequality of Black and White persons in America, beginning with the first African slaves brought to our shores in 1619.

The night before Jesus was crucified, knowing that he would be leaving his disciples, his friends who shared his life for 3 years, Jesus looked to heaven and prayed, “Father, I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word [that’s you and me!], that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one...” (John 17:20-23, NRSV) Jesus prayed for you and me, that we be one as he and the Father are one. And he prayed to the Father “that they [we] be in us...” He prayed that we participate, with him, in the life and love of the Holy Trinity.

AMEN

1 Marcia Pally, “Our post-pandemic future: What basics should be its basis?” ABC Religion & Ethics, Posted Sun 24 May 2020, 9:57am, Updated Sun 24 May 2020, 9:57am

<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/marcia-pally-what-basics-should-be-the-basis-of-our-post-pandem/12280752>

2 “God Is Relationship,” Richard Rohr’s daily email meditation for Thursday, May 9, 2019 <https://cac.org/god-is-relationship-2019-05-09/>

3 Pally, *ibid.*