

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, May 22nd 2016

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

On this wonderful celebration of our one God in three persons, I feel drawn to avoid reflecting on the "ideas" surrounding this profound mystery, but to reflect on my experience of the mystery. Again, I want to reflect less upon ideas about the three persons and more upon my growing relationship with each of them.

I remember that an early step in the growth of my relationship with God was first a realization and then an experience of praying to "God," in thanksgiving and petition - much in the spirit of the Psalms. At some point it really overwhelmed me that there was a deep difference in me when I addressed God as "Father." I remember crying at the warmth and personal feelings it brought me. My relationship with my own father was so wonderful, this affectionate, protective, close bond with a loving Father who made me and saved me became quite beautiful. I remember the period when I realized, quite profoundly, that not everyone had a loving human father. I also came through that time when it wasn't very religiously correct to talk about God as "Father" because it carried a "patriarchal," and painful meaning for some. I appreciated reflecting on God as "Mother" at times, and, again, felt grateful because I had such a loving mother as well. The power of the relationship grew at various moments and in various struggles. Mercy was at the heart of this relationship, but it also was about awe and closeness. I have always been interested in science. I had a reflector telescope when I was in high school and was fascinated by the sky - especially the moon, the planets and the uncountable vast amount of stars and galaxies visible to us. The incredible images from the Hubble telescope of deep space have brought me even more wonder and awe at the Creator of it all - in its unimaginable size and complexity - who is my Father - a father to me. The Creator of all of creation, down to the human person - with the abilities to love and communicate - to create music and play the piano and to map the human genome; to travel to the moon and to probe the planets and into deep space; to love a baby and sacrifice one's own happiness in marriage and care for those most in need - that Creator, knows and loves and sustains me, every moment.

The whole mystery of the Incarnation is wonderfully summed up by the imaginative reflection of St. Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises, about the Trinity having a meeting to decide what to do with humanity and the mess we'd gotten ourselves into. Ignatius imagines the Trinity deciding to send the Second Person to redeem this world by becoming one of us. I studied all about this mystery for many years, but the powerful gift for me has been a genuine relationship with Jesus himself. With years of desiring and longing, fighting selfishness and distracting "needs" and "adventures," Jesus has become a personal companion. An ongoing barrier to the depth of this relationship is my sense that I'm so unreliable. However, Ignatius invites us to let ourselves become a loved sinner who then is called to an intimate relationship with Jesus. We focus on our sins. Jesus says, "Be with me in the mission I have from the Father." We are invited to pray for the grace, "to see him more clearly, to love him more intimately, so that we might follow him more closely." The attraction comes with discovering who Jesus is - what he says and does. That attraction leads to affection and a bond of closeness, which draws us to want to be like the one who is so attractive to us. Jesus teaches us how to love and then shows us his limitless, unconditional, dying-to-self love for us. His loving heart moves my heart to love like his. When this love gets through my defenses and pursuit of self, it is more than overwhelming. The gift of companionship with the person of Jesus is one that keeps growing in me.

Jesus promised to not leave us orphans and to send us his Spirit, who would gather us and teach us all we need to know. This Spirit, coming from Jesus and the Father, gives gifts of grace - freeing us from all that holds us back from loving heroically and setting us on fire. There are so many things we can say about the Spirit and how the Spirit animates all that is good and holy, all that is unifying and loving, all that leads from self to grace. However, it is the experience of the Spirit that has grown in me in these latter years of my life. I've known people who were "Spirit filled" and I deeply admired them. I was always a bit afraid of that. Gradually, the powerful words of Jesus and Paul became very simple. The presence of the Holy Spirit of Jesus and our Loving Father is tangible and wonderful. The Spirit confirms (makes firm or strong; authorizes and guarantees) whatever is a movement of the Divine in us and around us. Joy, which can be so rare and fragile, is a gift of the Spirit. It is a palpable experience of the Spirit's presence. In the absence of Joy or Peace or Balance or any of the self-sacrificing gifts, the simple prayer, "Come, Holy Spirit!" is tremendously freeing. It is a gentle breeze and can be the fire of Love itself. It is the essence of the courage that comes from never being alone.

On the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, we can give ourselves time to be renewed in our relationship with the three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And, we can grow in our desires for a greater openness to the graces that each person want to offer us. May this feast bring us all a renewal in the graces we need and desire to enjoy the very personal gift of God's love for us - for God's greater glory and the service of others.

Andy Alexander, S.J.-Creighton University's Collaborative Ministry Office