

June 16, 2019

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

John 16:12-15

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.

Background:

The early disciples did not have the advantage of centuries or even decades of reflecting on the nature of Jesus' relationship to God and how the Holy Spirit fit into that relationship. The need to understand the Holy Spirit arises with Jesus' departure and return to God. That the early Church found it necessary and important to reflect on the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is demonstrated by the five statements about their relationship found in John's gospel.

- "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world can not accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you." (John 14:16-17)
- "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name--he will teach everything and remind you of all that I told you." (John 14:26)
- "When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me. And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:26-27)
- "But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation: sin, because they do not believe in me; righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; condemnation, because the ruler of this world has been condemned." (John 16:7-11)
- The last is John 16:12-15, the gospel text for today, Trinity Sunday.

These passages describe the Holy Spirit as the presence of God that will reassure a Christian community that is struggling with all the questions that face them, now that Jesus is no longer in their midst.

As part of this struggle, the early disciples had to deal with a culture that valued honor more than truthfulness. There are a number of incidents recorded in the gospels that reflect this mindset. For example, after Jesus dismisses the woman caught in adultery, (John 8:1-11) Jesus enters a long discussion with the Pharisees about the validity of this action. (John 8:12-59) After much debate Jesus finally says to them: "Whoever belongs to God hears the word of God; for this reason you do not listen, because you do not belong to God." (John 8:47) In order to deflect Jesus' accusation, they indirectly say something they know to be false: "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed?" (John 8:48) They know that Jesus is not a Samaritan, and that he is not possessed. But they are not interested in truthfulness. Instead they are avoiding Jesus' accusation and trying to maintain some degree of honor. Another familiar example is Peter's denial of his relationship to Jesus outside of the house of Annas, the High Priest. (John 18:25-27) In this culture it was better for Peter to preserve his honor, even for a short time, than to tell the truth. Therefore he tells those who suggest that he is a follower of Jesus that he does not even know the man. Peter is able to maintain some degree of honor even if it is at the cost of being truthful about his relationship to Jesus. As a value, this is very different from western culture, but it may not be so different from western practice.

In this culture, the Holy Spirit being the guardian and source of truth is a much-needed reassurance for the early Christians. They are faced with opposition from both civil and religious authorities of the day, and their own internal doubts and fears with the belated return of Jesus. The Holy Spirit guides them to all truth. The Holy Spirit doesn't present his own truth, he presents the truth that he has taken from the Son--and he presents it to them (and us).

Reflection Questions:

1. What sources of information do you trust to be accurate, and which do you approach with suspicion? How does that reality affect you?

2. At the beginning of our text, Jesus says “I have much more to tell you, but you can not bear it now.” If you were one of the disciples, you would have responded...
3. The spirit will (1) guide the disciples to all truth, (2) declare the things that are coming, and (3) glorify Jesus by telling them about him. How do you experience God working in these ways in your life?
4. When you pray, do you notice that some of your prayers seem to be addressed to God as Father, others to the Son, and still others to the Spirit?
5. As you read this passage, what is it that seems to be the primary motivation for Jesus giving this instruction to the disciples?
6. To me, the importance of God being a trinity of persons rather than a single divine person...
7. Can you talk now with God about your understanding of God’s relationship within God’s self, and how that affects your understanding of how God is in relationship with you, or about any other thought or awareness that arose within you in this text?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted. Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

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Excerpts from the readings for June 16, 2019, The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Thus says the wisdom of God: "The Lord possessed me, the beginning of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; from of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains or springs of water; before the mountains were settled into place, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet the earth and fields were not made, nor the first clods of the world. "When the Lord established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep; when he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth; when he set for the sea its limit, so that the waters should not transgress his command; then was I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, playing before him all the while, playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the human race."

O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!
 When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you set in place —
 What is man that you should be mindful of him, or the son of man that you should care for him?
 You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor.
 You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet:
 All sheep and oxen, yes, and the beasts of the field,
 The birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, and whatever swims the paths of the seas.

Brothers and sisters: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God.

Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

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Excerpts from Proverbs 8:22-31; Psalm 8:4-9; Romans 5:1-5; and John 16:12-15