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When the day came that my niece could finally adopt the two children who had been in her foster care, they celebrated their day of becoming a “forever family” as the greatest of their lives. They continue to celebrate each “adoptoversary” as a wonderful reminder that they chose to love each other as family for all time. That is a simple analogy to what Jesus tells the disciples at the Last Supper in today’s selection from John’s Gospel.

As Jesus prepares to go away, he promises his disciples his “forever presence” in the person of his own Spirit. When we read this pledge in the context of the entire discourse, we realize that what he promises through the Spirit goes beyond the physical presence they have experienced and anything he has already given them.

As Jesus speaks about the Spirit that he will send his disciples, the description becomes a mini-discourse on the Trinity. Jesus pledges to the disciples that the Spirit will keep them aware of who he is. Jesus, who had already proclaimed that he is the truth, now promises that the Spirit will guide them to all truth. He says that everything that the Father has is his and promises that the Spirit will give them what belongs to him.

If the pronouns in that paragraph have been confusing and you are not sure who “he” is, that is because the three of them are described as one. Jesus taught that he and the Father are one, and that everything that the Father has is his. Now, he says that his work will be carried on through the Spirit, who will share with the disciples what belongs to him — and therefore to the Father. As he puts it a little later, “I in them and you in me” (John 17:23). Classic theology has described the Spirit as the living bond of love between the Father and the Son. In this Gospel, Jesus promises the Spirit as the energy or bond that will bring his disciples to share his own union with God.

It is easy to see this as the heady, holy stuff that belongs to mystics in their monasteries. As soon as we begin to think that way, we must remind ourselves that Jesus said this to the gang of bumlbers who had walked with him for three years, declared their love, and then run from his suffering. Jesus’ followers were the most ordinary of sinful saints. The example of their lives leaves the rest of us no room to call ourselves too simple, weak or fearful.

That is one dimension of the message we hear today in Paul’s Letter to the Romans. Paul is saying that we are “justified,” by which he means that God offers us peace through Christ, that there need be no limits to our hope. And just to be sure we understand, he points out that this has nothing to do with our merits or accomplishments; it is due to God’s love and nothing else. Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth would guide us. Paul explains this by saying God’s love “has been poured out into our hearts.”

For those who like down-to-earth examples, it is a lot like my niece and the kids. Although they had barely reached “the age of reason” at adoption time, she made them part of the decision. To the best of their ability, they agreed and she made it legal. They know a unity and bond of love that is all the stronger for its being chosen rather than simply being a happenstance of biology.

The mystery of the Trinity we celebrate today is a mystery of love. This feast invites us to contemplate the triune God as love constantly outpoured. When Jesus speaks of the Spirit, he makes it explicit that we are invited into the dynamic of that love.

From the beginning, humanity has tried to name — and thus understand — God. Some spoke of Zeus, others of Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu. More than a billion people worship God as Allah, described by 99 names, including most especially “The Merciful” and “The Compassionate.”

In February 2019, Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb declared in a jointly signed document on human fraternity that, “The pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom.” That is a reminder that we cannot aspire to understand God. Nevertheless, our faith reveals God as the One who reaches out to us, coming to us in terms that are both understandable and intriguingly mysterious. Christianity teaches that we are invited into the dynamic mystery symbolized by the three names, Father, Son and Spirit.

The other three-word formula we can use is simply: “God is love.”

## **PROVERBS 8:22-31**

Today’s Liturgy of the Word begins with an introduction to Lady Wisdom, a companion to God the Creator. In her book *Preaching the New Lectionary*, Dianne Bergant comments, “The mysterious figure of Woman Wisdom has intrigued interpreters since the first day she appeared alongside God at the time of the creation of the universe.” Scholars see the influence of Israel’s pagan neighbors in the personification of Wisdom in this reading, suggesting that it may reflect ideas about a goddess from another culture. This song to Wisdom may also have originally been a poem praising Solomon’s wisdom. Of course, the church has chosen this selection for our celebration of the Trinity because later creeds would echo some of its ideas — with the exception of all the feminine pronouns.

The phrase that our version of Scripture translates “from of old I was poured forth” (italics added), uses a Hebrew word that very well can be translated as “begotten.” In that sense, Wisdom seems to be a figure of Jesus, the Son who was begotten, not made. The phrase implies that Wisdom, although uniquely personal, is not separate from God in the same way as the rest of creation. That leads to the temptation to read Proverbs as if it were written from a modern mindset. Doing that, we can easily posit that Wisdom prefigures Christ or the Spirit or even that Wisdom reflects the feminine side of God. None of those interpretations is likely true to the mind of the author or the Jewish communities in which these writings were used.

Rather than try to capture the figure of Wisdom as a goddess or a reflection of Christ or the Spirit, we can allow the reading to speak for itself. If we abandon attempts to fit this passage into our own theology or mindset, it becomes a lovely depiction of creation and the interplay of a creature with the God who begot her.

In that light, Wisdom is the first witness to all God does. She watches the process of creation with exquisite delight. Then, not only is she an observer, but she is so enchanted that she actually gets involved in the process with God, helping to craft creation and delighting God in all that she does. She describes her participation in creation as play, suggesting that God too was playing throughout the creative process.

As we avoid the urge to conceive of Wisdom as a member of the Trinity, we can still appreciate the idea that she, the first “other” in all of creation, was drawn into intimate relationship with God. In that sense, she models the vocation God gave humanity from the beginning, the vocation to participate in the creation of the world, delighting in God even as God delights in humanity and all of creation. She reminds us that God created in joy for the purpose of sharing that joy.

## **PSALMS 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9**

The church must be trying to tell us something with today’s choice of psalms. One would think that on the feast of the Trinity we would sing enthusiastic praise like “The Old 100th” or echo “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name.” But no, we pray Psalm 8, a psalm that celebrates the glorious vocation God has given to humankind.

Granted, our refrain sings “How wonderful your name in all the earth!” but our verses contemplate the beauty of creation and God’s incredible love for humanity. The first stanza essentially asks the core question: “What are we that you should

be mindful of us?” The next stanza then proclaims that God has made us little less than the angels and has handed creation over into our hands.

We sing, “How wonderful your name!” To what name are we referring? Perhaps that is what our psalm invites us to contemplate today. As we celebrate our triune God, we remember that we have traditionally called on God by three names: Father, Son and Spirit. While those three names say something about God’s communal being, they are also names through which we can relate to God. We praise the Father/Creator who made the heavens and earth. We give thanks for the Savior/Son who has shown us God’s great care for us. We ask for the grace of God’s indwelling Spirit that we may continue the work of God’s hands.

It all comes down to the fact that we give thanks and praise not simply because God exists, but because this God reaches out to us and loves us into being in more ways than we can name or imagine.

## **ROMANS 5:1-5**

This short section from Paul’s Letter to the Romans depicts the relationship of peace between God and humanity that is made possible by Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit. Paul opens with the idea that we have been justified by faith: A concept that is as basic as bedrock to many Protestants and can sound like a foreign language to Catholics.

For Paul, justification is the equivalent of what Catholics call salvation. It implies forgiveness of sin and freedom. The person who has faith is justified, meaning that she or he has accepted God’s loving forgiveness. Through that process, people of faith are freed from the power of sin as well. This also means that they have been liberated from false ideas about God as a legalistic judge requiring strict compliance and the belief that death brings an end to life.

According to Paul, the newness of life that a Christian experiences in justification has come through Jesus Christ. He has revealed that God’s intentions and attitude toward humanity have always been for salvation. Another way that Paul describes what salvation/justification means is by saying that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The peace to which Paul refers is multifaceted. It includes the freedom of the Exodus and homecoming from exile. It also describes the state of harmony that exists when human beings are at one with one another and God. Peace comes from understanding what Christ has revealed: We are God’s beloved, no longer servants, but friends.

Each of Paul’s phrases encapsulates his entire theology. Thus, another way he expresses his understanding of justification is by saying that through Christ we have access to God. In ancient courts, there were officials who decided which visitors were worthy of access to the ruler. Paul teaches that by revealing God’s unquenchable love for humanity, Christ reveals that God’s love confers on us the dignity that grants us access to God’s grace, that is, to a life-fulfilling relationship with God. The relationship between faith and grace is so integral that we might say that the willingness to have faith changes people interiorly such that God’s grace can become the animating principle of their life. People who live in grace can approach God confident that it is God’s will for us to enjoy being in the divine presence.

Toward the end of our selection from Romans, Paul explains that God’s grace, God’s love poured into our hearts, is the work of the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. God’s grace becomes the interior dynamic, the energy of our lives. This is but one more way of describing the intimacy God offers humanity.

On this feast of the Most Holy Trinity, the church has chosen this reading particularly because it is one of the Christian Scripture passages that seems to speak clearly of the three persons of the Trinity. But rather than offering us precise trinitarian theology, this passage falls all over itself in speaking of God’s great love for humanity. In the end, that is what trinitarian theology means for humanity.

## **JOHN 16:12-15**

Paul spoke about God’s grace: our justification through Christ and the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. In John’s Gospel, we hear Jesus describe the Spirit as the disciples’ interior teacher. The coming of this teacher is necessary because the earthly Jesus will not be with them forever — much less with those who will come after. Although the disciples couldn’t understand it at the Last Supper, the Spirit is God’s greatest gift to them.

As we consider this Gospel, it is instructive to recall that the Greek word *pneuma* (spirit) is neuter in gender. It generally translates the Hebrew word, transliterated as *ruah*, which is feminine as are the Hebrew Scriptures' depictions of wisdom. While English must use a pronoun to express an idea like "when he comes," Greek, like many other languages, can express actions without the limitation of a gender specific pronoun. The verb itself is open to a contextual interpretation as to whether he, she or it performed the action in question. Aware that except for the incarnate Jesus, God has no gender, we should be cautious about how our language can incorrectly limit our images of God.

In promising to send the Spirit, Jesus is inviting his disciples not just to follow him, but to allow themselves to be motivated by the same love that moves him. This is a more intimate relationship than human beings can achieve by or among themselves. As our reading from Romans indicated, this can be called grace or peace. It becomes a way of being in the world.

As he speaks to the disciples, Jesus describes the Spirit in ways that mirror his own life and vocation. He says that the Spirit speaks "what he hears." In other words, like Jesus, the Spirit speaks from the heart of God, from a shared will and point of view.

Another way in which Jesus describes the union he shares with the Father and the Spirit is to say that the Spirit "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 [the Spirit] will take from what is mine and declare it to you." This description of having everything in common offers a vision of the dynamic of love that constitutes the being of God. Jesus describes his union with the Father and Spirit as one of having everything in common. Obviously, because this does not refer to material possessions, it is speaking of sharing the same interior attributes such as knowledge, emotion and will, all of which we summarize by referring to God's love.

This is vitally important, not so much for what we believe it teaches us about God in God's own self but because Jesus promised us this Spirit. If the Spirit dwells in us, then we are invited to be guided and motivated by the very same divine knowledge, emotion and will — in a word, by divine love.

## **Planning: Trinity Sunday**

**By: Lawrence Mick**

Today brings us to a Sunday in Ordinary Time, but we don't use green vestments this Sunday or next Sunday. The Easter season is followed by two doctrinal feasts: the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity and the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. There has been some criticism of such feasts as "idea feasts," but we can also see them as continued reflections of the Easter celebration. Those who were baptized at Easter were baptized into the life of the Trinity and initiated into the eucharistic meal that sustains us in living out our baptismal commitment.

The celebration of the Trinity has long seemed like a primary idea feast, focusing our attention on the mystery of three persons in one God. It is an idea that boggles the mind and has led to numerous frustrations among theologians and preachers trying to "explain" it. We really can't explain such a mystery, but that is not the point of this belief anyway. What is important is that we realize that we are called to enter into the very life of the Trinity, to share in the eternal love that flows within this primary community of persons we call Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In recent years, numerous theologians in the Western church have helped us to understand a perspective that has been maintained in the Eastern church throughout history — God became human so that humans could become divine. That does not mean that we actually become God, but it does mean that we share God's life and love.

Planners and preachers need to study and reflect on this revived theology if they are to help the assembly to enter fully into this celebration and to enter more fully into divine life. Don't let the logical conundrum of three-in-one keep you from mining the richness of this mystery. What is needed is less of an intellectual response and more of a response of love.

The first reading today also suggests another helpful insight. Wisdom speaks of being present at creation. Tradition has seen Christ as the wisdom of God. The Christ was present at creation and Paul says Christ will be "all in all"

(1Corinthians 15: 28) at the end of time. The Christ is the pattern God had in mind. As Christ is both human and divine, so we humans are called to share divine life. Jesus is the incarnation of the Christ, the model for all of us to follow in order to share fully the divine life of love.

Because this solemnity falls in Ordinary Time, you will find the prayers in the Missal after the 34th week of Ordinary Time. The readings can be found in the Lectionary in a similar place, but they are preceded by Alleluia verses for Ordinary Time.

This is also Father's Day in the U.S., so remember to offer a blessing for fathers during Masses this weekend.

## **Prayers: Trinity Sunday**

By: Joan DeMerchant

### **Introduction**

Relationships — even genetic ones — are a mystifying reality, and the best efforts to explain them are often poetic. They are often described in terms of their results, as in today's readings on this celebration of God as a community. God's love, peace, truth and hope deepen our relationship to one another, the Earth, and all creatures. We don't need to understand this, only to believe and live it.

### **Penitential Act**

- Lord Jesus, you spoke of the intimacy between you, the Spirit and the Father: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you shared this deep relationship with your disciples and with us: Lord, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you give us faith and love, hope and truth to share with others: Lord, have mercy.

### **Prayer of the Faithful**

**Presider** Let us pray now for a world that is in need of loving relationships.

**Minister** For the church, that as a faith community we may faithfully witness to the ongoing love bestowed upon us and the whole human race, we pray:

- For those isolated, yearning for family, friends or community; for those who have been betrayed; and for those society has unjustly marginalized, we pray:
- For an end to solitary confinement, to separating children from parents at the border, and separating people from others as punishment or control, we pray:
- For the wise use of social media, may it be a tool to enhance rather than rupture relationships, we pray:
- For those organizations that promote the unification of families, the adoption of children, justice for the unjustly accused, or the care of animals, we pray:
- For a renewal of international collaboration and a national concern for the needs of others across the world, we pray:
- For all fathers, stepfathers and grandfathers; for all men who serve and guide young people; for their strength, tenderness, courage and wisdom, we pray:

**Presider** Triune God, you show us what it means to be unique, yet united. Show us how we can contribute to a world in need of love, peace and hope through our individual actions and our efforts as a loving community. Make us signs of your mutual love shown through Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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