

Trinity Sunday
May 31, 2015
Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Matthew 28:16-20

Until 1986, when she died at the age of ninety, I spent at least one Sunday a month visiting my great-grandmother in Doylestown, down in Bucks County. My grandparents, my parents, and all my siblings would either be fed by her at her little apartment or later be taken out to eat at a nice restaurant. Widowed twice, my great-grandmother lived alone, so when we came to visit she made our time with her memorable. And she wasn't afraid to indulge our appetites, even if our preferences were different than hers: the first time I ever ate McDonald's was at her apartment. She had gotten take-out in anticipation of our visit.

Being present with others is a good part of what it means to be a Christian, especially if they are alone, vulnerable, weak, sick, or ostracized. This reality is derived in part from Jesus' words in Matthew 25: "Even as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it also to me." But we must also understand that this presence with the other is an essential aspect of God's very nature, and to understand who God is helps us to understand who we are, since we have been made in His image and likeness, and thus why we do the good we do.

God's Trinitarian nature is revealed in the New Covenant, articulated in the Gospels. Our passage today is perhaps the most famous and explicit mention of the Trinity in the Bible: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." One God in three persons implies that God's very nature is relational, that the persons of the Trinity relate to one another. The Lord's passion, death and resurrection demonstrate that that relationality is based in love, the pouring out of the Father's love for the Son and the Son pouring out His love for the Father, from which the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Advocate, proceeds.

Therefore, we must look at what else Jesus says to the disciples in today's Gospel before his ascension into heaven. He says, "Behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Incorporated into this eternal relational presence that is inherent to God's nature is the fellowship of Christ's disciples, the Church. Jesus is present with us as He is present with the Father and the Holy Spirit; so to be true to our own nature, made as it is in the image and likeness of God, then, we must be intentionally present with those likewise made in God's image and likeness. Fellowship with one another in the Church is not something tacked on, as if it were something optional in the practice of the Faith. Fellowship with other Christians is a reflection of the love perfectly manifested in the relationship between the persons of the Trinity.

What is also essential to this relationality is the nature of it, and St. Paul points to this in our passage from Romans, chapter 8. He says, "We are children of God . . . and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." We are not only called to be with others in the way Jesus is with us to the close of the age; we are also to suffer with others as Jesus suffered with us. The incarnational presence requires of us the same self-offering we see perfectly manifested in Jesus' death upon the cross for our salvation. Our suffering, then, is redemptive, insofar as

it is a participation in the suffering of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world. Our self-offering is a dim reflection of the love Jesus shows for the Father and the Father shows to the Son.

The question then is how we manifest this love in being present with others, and to do this I want to refer back to the illustration I began with, my family's Sunday visits to my great-grandmother. As she got older, it became increasingly apparent that she could not really take care of herself. One Sunday dinner I discovered the salad dressing had an expiration date from 1976, and that was in 1984. This was after we discovered all the glasses in her cupboard were dirty and had to be washed before we sat down for dinner. Our visits didn't cease, but we began to go out, and finally after she could no longer drive herself, we would do down to Doylestown and drive her back to Bethlehem for family events. I was helping her down the stairs into our yard when she suffered the stroke that sent her to the hospital for the last time. I take no credit for this, as I was only fifteen at the time. This Trinitarian incarnational love was at the time being taught to me by my parents and grandparents. If we hope to be glorified, we must suffer with Christ, which means to suffer with the suffering.

It is easy to be with others when everything is light and our neighbors are doing what we want to be doing. Being present with others is sacrificial when others are dark and we're supposed to be the light, when celebrations of life are an inconvenience and prevent us from being where we'd prefer. Remember that Jesus prayed that the cup of His passion and death would pass from Him, but concluded by saying to the Father, "Not my will be done, but thine."

Being on call at the hospitals in Scranton brought this truth home to me and has helped my family and me to weather inconveniences and see them as opportunities to love. Just yesterday I was late to a party to which we were invited because I was called to visit a widow at Moses Taylor. Indeed, being on call reminds us to attach the qualifier, "if it be God's will" to all of our plans. The Lord may present someone to love when we were intending to go love someone else. This, too, is a form of suffering, a death of the will if not actually martyrdom. Faith in the Trinity means being present with God's children when God wants us to. It means uniting our wills to His so that His will becomes truly what we want.

The unification of our wills with the Lord's becomes our sacrifice of thanksgiving, a manifestation of our gratitude for all the blessings God has bestowed upon us. And I'm not talking here only about the sick, weak, vulnerable, and lonely. Birthdays, anniversaries, school concerts, athletic events, even vacations are opportunities to love, to sublimate our wills to do what we want and honor God's will to be where we should with those He wants us to be with until the close of the age and for all eternity.

So while my own will would have me spend time with you after Mass at coffee hour, today is Msgr. William Feldcamp's fiftieth jubilee celebration, fifty years since he was ordained, and he invited me to concelebrate the Mass with him. Who has done more for our parish than he who was our pastor for seven years? To honor him who was our advocate, defender, and father, I will be parted from you for an afternoon, as God would have it. But it may well be that on my way there, the Lord will present me with someone else to love, in which case I will make His will my own, all to manifest the will of the Trinity. May all we do then be a sign of this devotion to be with others as our Lord is present with us.