

Trinity Sunday

Preached June 11, 2017; St. Peter Catholic Church, The Dalles, Oregon

Last week, on Pentecost, I emphasized that the Holy Spirit is not just the Spirit of divine love, but also, according to the words of Jesus, the Spirit of truth who leads us to all truth. The supreme truth, the supreme reality, is the reality of the Most Holy Trinity in whom love and truth are inseparable.

The opening prayer or collect for today's celebration of the Most Holy Trinity also speaks to the inseparability of truth and love in God. God sends into the world the inseparable Word of truth and the Spirit of sanctification that reveal his wondrous mystery, the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity.

In God love and truth are inseparable, but one of the tragedies of human life is the separation of truth and love, which deforms love and renders truth sterile.

Now surprisingly one place in our experience where truth and love often come together is in the wondrous reality of beauty that reflects the beauty of God himself. Authentic beauty is the splendor of truth that inspires love.

That is surprising because since as long as we can remember we have had it drilled into us that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The proverb, however, is not really true; it only really holds in small matters of little importance, where difference is truly a matter of taste. True beauty, however, is universal and the failure to recognize such beauty reveals the poverty of soul and spiritual blindness of the beholder.

At this time of the year if you drive around The Dalles there are roses blooming all over the place. So, let us consider three men standing next to each other looking at the same freshly blooming rosebush. They all see the same thing? Right? Wrong.

Indeed, the scientist will say that given their eyes are healthy they all see the same thing, the same colors, the same shapes, all governed by the same laws of optics. Science, however, considers only a part of the reality of the flower. Of the three men, however, one merely sees brightly colored flowers and cares nothing for their beauty. He grumbles, "What use are these roses; they just take up space." The second one looks with admiration at the beautiful roses. The third not only admires the beautiful roses, but sees in their beauty a reflection of the unsurpassable beauty of the Creator and gives praise to God for his handiwork. These differences of vision are not merely 'subjective' as we may be accustomed to thinking. All three look at the same thing with their human eyes and human mind, but the first sees less, the second more, and the third even more. The first has only a very partial vision of

reality; the second, while he sees more, also has a limited vision of reality; the third has a fuller vision of reality.

Next let me observe that we are mistaken if we think that beauty is beheld merely by the eyes. The beauty of the roses is completely lost on the dog that is standing alongside the three men. The man who fails to admire the beauty of the roses is capable of doing so; maybe he just happened to be tired or in a bad mood that day. The dog will never be capable of perceiving the beauty of the roses. That is because beauty is perceived more by the mind, through the eyes, than by the eyes themselves. It should not, then, surprise us that there is a spiritual beauty that can only be perceived by the mind, such is the beauty of God himself.

Now what does all this have to do with the Most Holy Trinity? The Holy Trinity is the supreme truth, the supreme beauty, the supreme object of contemplation. Nevertheless, the sublime beauty of the Trinity so often leaves us unmoved and indifferent.

Why? Our culture has become very utilitarian; when that utilitarian spirit is applied to religion, religion is reduced to a sterile moralism, a set of meaningless rules; then we begin asking, "What do I get out of it?" We end up with consumer religion, driven by the perceived needs of the customer. For that very reason, truth, beauty, contemplation, and finally love itself, have practically disappeared from the horizon of religion; this is made evident in the way we worship. All this has made the traditional Christian faith, especially the doctrine of the Trinity, seem unintelligible and irrelevant in our day and age.

I have spoken of contemplation. The contemplative spirit is the opposite of the utilitarian spirit. The word 'contemplation' speaks of the gaze of the eye or mind that recognizes, admires, and delights in what is truly beautiful. Two lovers who gaze upon each other's face are in a certain manner 'contemplatives'; contemplation of beauty gives rise to love and in the measure that the beauty is true, the love is right. The Christian faith, however, is fundamentally contemplative; it is fundamentally about God, not about man.

Now don't get me wrong, there is most certainly a proper Christian morality, but that morality, that way of life, rightly understood does not stand by itself, but is either the preparation for or the outward expression of the contemplative gaze.

For those who are not indifferent, then, for those who are open to the contemplative dimension of faith, the Holy Spirit leads us to all truth. Since ancient times it was said that the Holy Spirit leads to the knowledge of the Son and the Son leads to knowledge of the Father.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks to us of the ancient distinction between "theology" and "economy"; the divine economy or plan of salvation reveals and reflects the truth and beauty of the Most Holy Trinity:

“The Fathers of the Church distinguish between theology (*theologia*) and economy (*oikonomia*). ‘Theology’ refers to the mystery of God’s inmost life within the Blessed Trinity and ‘economy’ to all the works by which God reveals himself and communicates his life. Through the *oikonomia* the *theologia* is revealed to us; but conversely, the *theologia* illuminates the whole *oikonomia*. God’s works reveal who he is in himself; the mystery of his inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works. So it is, analogously, among human persons. A person discloses himself in his actions, and the better we know a person, the better we understand his actions.” (CCC 236)

Through the divine ‘economy’ the “Word of truth” and the “Spirit of sanctification” lead us into the wondrous mystery of God, the ‘theology’, the Trinity of eternal glory, united and powerful in his majestic beauty.

This also leads us to full meaning also of the famous words we have heard in today’s Gospel: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life.*

God, the Father, in the love of the Holy Spirit, gives us his Son, who is one with him in the eternal glory and majesty of the godhead, but who for our salvation was made man and born of the Virgin Mary in the fullness of time. The invisible beauty of God shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ and is revealed in the divine ‘economy’ of the Son of God made man. The whole divine ‘economy’ revolves around that gift of God’s Son, in the Holy Spirit; that gift of God’s Son, in Bethlehem and on the Cross and in the Holy Eucharist, three wondrous mysteries of the divine economy, three beautiful mysteries of the divine economy.

That gift of the Son reveals to us the greatness and beauty of divine love and when the grace of the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our faith to perceive the reality and truth of that beauty, we are entranced and drawn into the loving contemplation of God. We are then inwardly transformed by that contemplative gaze and then the ‘economy’ of our outward life, we could say, reveals the ‘theology’ of our inward contemplation, the Holy Trinity dwelling in our hearts as in a temple. That is the path of the divine ‘economy’ that leads us to the fullness of eternal life in the bosom of the Most Holy Trinity. That is also the contemplative path that lies at the heart of the Mass, the true worship of God, and which should be manifest in the care and reverence given the celebration of the Mass, the music of the Mass, and the adornment of the temple.

That is the same path by which the Blessed Virgin Mary, fully sanctified by the Holy Spirit in her Immaculate Conception, was able to give birth to the Son of God in the fullness of time, so as finally to be taken up by him to the Father’s house in heaven in her glorious Assumption.