

Solemnity of the Holy Trinity (B)



A couple received by mail two tickets for a first class New York City Broadway show. They did not understand who sent them, but they thankfully went. They returned home and found their home stripped of cash, paintings, and jewels. On their table, they found a note which read, "NOW YOU UNDERSTAND." We will never receive a similar note about the Trinity. The roots of today's solemn feast can be traced back to the early Church. Today we can say with my ancestor, the peerless St Patrick, "I arise today, through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the threeness, through confession of the oneness of the Creator of Creation."

The story is told of a priest sitting in an airport waiting for his flight.

A fellow killing time struck up a conversation. Said he, "Father, I believe only what I can understand. So, I can't buy your Trinity. Perhaps you can explain it to me." The priest reluctantly put down The New York Times. "Do you see the sun out there?" "Yup." "OK, it's 80 million miles away from us right now. The rays coming through the window," said the priest, "are coming from the sun. The delightful heat we are enjoying on our bodies right now come from a combination of the sun and its rays. Do you understand that?" The fellow answered, "Sure, padre." "The Trinity," the priest went on, "is like that. God the Father is that blazing sun. The Son is the rays He sends down to us. Then both combine to send us the Holy Spirit who is the heat. If you understand the workings of the sun, its rays, and heat, why do you have difficulty believing the Trinity?"

The man said something about catching a flight and was off. The priest, a physics professor, picked up

the Times with a broad smile. He doubted whether his recent guest understood the workings of the sun. He knew no one would ever comprehend the mystery of the Trinity this side of the grave. After all, why does God have to tell us everything? In his experience, He tells us only on a need to know basis. His favorite line from the Book of Job popped into his mind. "Can anyone penetrate the deep designs of God?" (11:7) As a scientist and a Catholic, he knew the answer to that question. Try to understand the Trinity and you become like a person staring, as someone said, into the noonday sun to better understand it. All you get is a serious headache requiring extra strength Tylenol and a resolve to buy good sunglasses.

Finally he put down the Times and recalled fondly his late Dogma professor in the seminary. When he came to the section on the Trinity in the textbook, he turned the pages quickly. The Dogma prof said, "Professor Thomas Aquinas, late of the University of Paris and the Albert Einstein of his day, didn't understand the Trinity. So, it is most unlikely that you blockheads will either. Just remember St Paul mentions the Trinity 30 times in his letters. Take it on faith and you'll muddle through somehow." He trusted that the professor and Thomas both now understood the Trinity perfectly. He himself never had difficulty buying into a God who is passionately in love with us, a Son who was willing to die for us, and a Holy Spirit whose job it is to help us become saints like Thomas of Aquin and Paris. He recalled the husband, who said when he became a father, he better understood the Trinity. When he and his wife had their son, they had evidence of their love for each other.

There was the lover, the beloved, and the love, each distinct and yet one. I enjoy the playful description of Daniel Durken of the Trinity. The Father played creator and was overjoyed that the world turned out so attractively. The Son played redeemer and put everything right again in the wounded world by stretching out His arms on a cross. The Spirit played sanctifier. He made room in the heart of each of us for the Trinity. "Today," says Durken, "the Trinity invites us to keep playing with them this delightful game of life and love." And why not? We have nothing to lose but our chains. Dante Alighieri expressed his thoughts on the triune God in verse. His Italian runs off the lips like music: "O trina luce, che in unica stella..." And, for the benefit only of the very young children reading these lines I translate, "O triune light, which in a single star contents all upon whom it shineth..."

Fr James Gilhooley