A PARISH AS A 4-D COMMUNITY

3-D Movies

Here’s how it works: Two cameras photograph each scene from slightly different points in space. When we sit in the movie theater the images on the screen appear blurred and unintelligible until we put on the special “3-D glasses” which unite the two differing perspectives into a new, a third perspective which not only is intelligible but also immersive. We find ourselves saying such things as, “It feels as though I am in the action, a part of the story”.

3-D Vision

Close one eye. Extend your arms in front of you, point your index fingers toward each other, and try to touch them together. When I do this, my fingers miss each other because, by employing only one perspective, my capacity to perceive depth is impaired. When I use both eyes, my brain (like the 3-D lens in a movie theater) correlates the two slightly different points of view from each eye enabling me to have a deeper and more accurate view of what’s going on. We call such vision stereo-scopic, from the Greek word meaning “solid-sight”

1 Adapted from an article in the Saint Ann Parish Newsletter of August 2012
or “seeing solids” because visually we have moved from a two dimensional plane into a three dimensional cube.

3-D Religion

Many religions make use of images such as icons, paintings, and stained glass. In addition to such two dimensional images (depicting height and width), Catholics in the Western Tradition also employ statues and so add a new, a third dimension of depth. At its best, our Western Catholic Way enables us to have a deeper and more solid feel for grace as we touch statues the Holy Ones; as we put St. Christopher on our car’s dashboard; as we begin and end the Rosary by kissing the tiny statue of the Crucified Jesus.

3-D Saint

Each of the four Western Rite Catholic Churches in Phoenixville have statues of Jesus, Mary, and St. Joseph. I wonder, though, how many of us realize that there is one additional saint who has a statue in
each parish church: **St. Therese.**² I have come to see that it as most fitting that she be depicted in a 3-D manner because she had a 3-D spirituality as expressed in her complete name: Sister **Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.**

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**Therese’s First - D: The Child Jesus**

One experience of life is that God is good, gracious, caring, tender, provident, protective, with us, for us. We might associate this perspective more with Christmas when we turn our attention to God who cares for us so much that He becomes one of us and comes among us as a beautiful child---so lovable and so easy to love. Emmanuel.

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**Therese’s Second - D: The Holy Face**

Another experience of life might be called the “Where are you God?” perspective. Are you there? Do you care? Are you all-powerful and if so, why aren’t you intervening to cure my loved one’s disease, to

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² See Appendix A - “St. Therese in Phoenixville’s Churches”.
He had no majestic bearing to catch our eye, no beauty to draw us to him. He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, knowing pain, Like one from whom you turn your face, spurned, and we held him in no esteem.³

³ Isaiah 53:2-3
⁴ See Appendix B - *You Lord Are Both Lamb and Shepherd*
hold differing perspectives that enables us (or not) to be drawn more deeply into life, to become more fully immersed in the action of grace afoot in our world. This is not to fall into utter and uncritical relativism (“everything is the same”; “there are no differences that matter”; “all perspectives are equally true”; “nothing is wrong”). It is, though, to admit that in this life where there is light there is shadow and to catch the message embodied in our very anatomy that when I point a finger at you I am pointing three fingers at myself.

**Time, The 4th - D**

So, you see what you see and I see what I see. Our differences remain and our differences matter. We do not always or easily or automatically experience a unified, integrated, deeper experience of a third perspective. Is God then absent? Do we flip a coin? Determine a winner and a loser? Go to litigation? Leave the Table?

I believe in religion, not in magic. Whereas magic is “Shazzaam!” and “Abra-cadabra!”, the Christ sent by the Father became incarnate, flesh and blood, in space (3-Ds) and in time (the 4th D). We hear proclaimed that Jesus “grew in wisdom, age and grace”\(^5\) over time\(^6\). If Jesus needed time to become fully human and grow into his awareness of his mission, then so will we. By coming to The Table each Lord’s Day we are staying at The Table---honoring grace incarnate in one another and allowing grace to shape our souls over time.\(^7\)

\(^5\) Luke 2:52  
\(^6\) See Appendix C - *Tell All the Truth*  
\(^7\) Regarding the dignity of human beings and the human process of being grown by grace into a fuller likeness of God, St. Peter Chrysologus preached: “Why then, man, are you so worthless in your own eyes and yet so precious to God? Why render yourself such dishonor when you are honored by him?”
A 4-D Community

In recent years I have gone for my annual retreat to the Abbey of the Genesee in New York State. In a book about the founding abbot of Genesee, and I found these words written about him apropos both to my life and to our life as the Body of Christ in St. Ann Parish:

The Trappist life is not something; it is Someone…. what you are actually doing is watching God as He goes about a task much more mysterious---and of far greater magnificence---than the one He accomplished when He call to Nothingness and evoked the Universe. For what He effected in the soul of this young monk was something infinitely more enduring than what He achieved when first He created the sun, stars, and moon. It was a task infinitely more delicate---and difficult; for Nothingness had to answer His summons, whereas the John Bernard McGinley who was to become first Frater Gerard, then Father Gerard, and finally Dom Gerard McGinley, could have said “no” to God at any time.8

APPENDIX – A

Holy Trinity Church

Sacred Heart Church

“St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face”

St. Mary of the Assumption Church

St. Ann Church
You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd.  
You, Lord, are both prince and slave.  
You peacemaker and sword-bringer  
Of the way you took and gave.  
**You, the Everlasting Instant;**  
You, whom we both scorn and crave.  

Clothed in light upon the mountain,  
Stripped of might upon the cross,  
Shining in eternal glory,  
Beggar’d by a soldier’s toss.  
**You, the Everlasting Instant;**  
You, whom are our gift and cost.  

You, who walk each day beside us,  
Sit in power at God’s side.  
You, who preach a way that’s narrow,  
Have a love that reaches wide.  
**You, the Everlasting Instant;**  
You, who are our pilgrim guide.  

Worthy is our earthly Jesus!  
Worthy is our cosmic Christ!  
Worthy you defeat and vict’ry;  
Worthy still your peace and strife.  
**You, the Everlasting Instant;**  
You, who are our death and life

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9 Hymn #525 in *Gather Comprehensive*
APPENDIX – C

Tell All The Truth

Tell all the truth but tell it slant----
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth’s superb surprise
As Lightning to the children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind----

Emily Dickinson