

St. Ann's Church – Washington, DC

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity – June 7, 2020

Homily by Msgr. Watkins, Pastor

My dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Ann's Church here in Washington, DC.

I greet all of you who join us by way of electronic media today as the Church honors the Most Holy Trinity, the Sunday after Pentecost. We have spoken in recent past here from this pulpit about the distinction between WANDERING and WONDERING. Wandering, we said, is the result of confusion, not knowing what to do, perhaps even panicking. And in light of so many things happening with the ongoing concerns about the pandemic as well as the recent demonstrations and marches here in Washington and across the nation for racial justice and equality following the death of George Floyd, there is cause for worry and confusion about the future. So, a lot of us might be Wandering right now, not being clear about where things are going or what to do about it. There's a lot of unrest and worry, and that can cause us to wander. But we said a few weeks ago that Wondering, on the other hand, is the result of walking humbly with the Lord in the midst of the current crises at hand and to trust in the mystery of His divine power to help us through these crises. What I'm suggesting for you today and in these days and weeks and even months ahead as the nation and world deal with so many crises, is that we are invited to WONDER even as we might WANDER on occasion. So, like the Christmas carol, I WONDER even as I WANDER. And I think that dance between Wonder and Wander is always going to be a mysterious challenge for each one of us as face any crisis. But for this sacred hour of worship and prayer, let us put aside as best we can the Wandering and breathe in the Holy Spirit into our souls and simply Wonder.

Today's Feast of the Holy Trinity causes us to wonder, to humbly acknowledge the nature of God revealed to us through Jesus and articulated by the Church for 2000 years. So, let's WONDER about the God who is revealed in a special way by our divine Lord to the Apostles and to us, not only because it says so much about the nature of the majestic Godhead but because it says so much about human

nature which is made in that image and likeness of God – and perhaps this reflection might help to shed some spiritual light on the complex crises of our day and our own response to them in a more mature manner. [Just as a footnote, I'm tired of preaching, so forgive me if my reflections this morning may sound more like teaching rather than preaching.]

I want first to talk about the Holy Trinity in the context of Mystery, because I think we need to understand what a real Mystery is. My mother was not a Catholic at the time she married my father in 1950. She came from the Presbyterian tradition but soon after her marriage saw a Catholic priest and inquired into becoming Catholic. The priest asked her, among other questions, whether she accepted the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. My mother responded that she knew that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but accepted that belief as a mystery, something she didn't understand. The priest told her that by merely accepting the fact that the Trinity is a mystery was sufficient to become Catholic. Mom converted. (I'm sure it wasn't that simple, but that's what I remember her telling me.) My point is that, yes, the Holy Trinity is indeed a Mystery, a big Mystery of Faith, but it is a most intelligent Mystery. What do I mean by that? I thought mysteries by their very nature as just that, namely, mysteries, and that mysteries can't be understood. Well, that's not really the full truth. The truth is that mysteries are meant to be solved as best they can. In other words, I can accept that a Trinity of Persons in one divine Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – three divine Persons) is a mystery, but that doesn't mean that the mystery is void of reason or intelligence. In fact, what makes a mystery truly a mystery is that it IS full of wisdom, intelligence, and meaning and that I can understand something about it even I can't understand all of it. Who of us picks up a mystery novel, for example, and says, "Well, it's a mystery, so I might as well close the book because I won't really know for certain "who done it" or "how it all ends."? No, we pick up the book and start eagerly reading, trying to figure the story out and piecing together the puzzle until we can "see" something really going on that makes sense, even if we can see the whole picture. When you pick up a good murder mystery, for example, you just can't put it down. It grips you. Well, there's something like that going on every time we confront a divine Mystery, like the Most Holy Trinity.

Or, put it another way, we know that mysteries are real and that we desire to really know who it all works out in the end. Therefore, we probe mysteries and try to figure them out. That's what makes them so exciting, so intriguing. On the other hand, we know that MYTHS are just that; myths are made-up stories about things. Mysteries, then, are not Myths. What Jesus reveals, therefore, are not Myths but Mysteries. And Jesus reveals these mysteries not because He doesn't want us to probe into them but because He wants us to do so with the caveat that we will never COMPLETELY know them. But to never COMPLETELY know or understand them doesn't mean that we can know SOMETHING about them. So, it's very immature to say, "Well, it's a mystery, so you can't know it." That's silly and it's demeaning both to God and man. God gave us reason, so let's use it wisely.

So, all of the so-called Mysteries of Catholic Christian Faith were revealed not by man but by God in Jesus Himself. And since Jesus reveals them, they can't be lies. Jesus can't lie. (That is, in fact, one thing God CANNOT do, that is, LIE!) Now, if I had it MY way, I really think it would have been much easier historically for the sake of interreligious dialogue over the centuries with the other great religions of Judaism and Islam if Christianity had simply concluded (as they do) that God is ONE and ONE alone without introducing the apparent confusion of the Mystery of the Trinity: "Three Persons in One God." I mean "One is One, and Three is Three, and it's so confusing to suggest Three is One or One is Three!" It would have been easier to say that we all believe in the SAME God, and that would go miles towards interreligious tolerance. Just say, "God is One. End of story." Well, the mystery of three divine Persons in one God was NOT what was revealed. Sorry. Christianity, like the others, believes in One God for sure, a clear Monotheism, but a relative Monotheism, that is, a Trinity of Persons. That's not exactly the same God as the others, but rather I would say it's a more complete picture of God. Or, it would have been easier historically if Christianity had said that Jesus is merely a holy prophet but NOT God Himself in the flesh (The Mystery of the Incarnation of the God-Man). It would have been easier historically if Christianity had said that Jesus were a prophet and that Mary, therefore, is the mother of a prophet but not the Mother of the God Jesus (The Mystery of her Immaculate Conception and the Mystery of the Conception of Jesus in her womb at the Annunciation). It would have been easier if Catholic Christianity had merely concluded that the elements of bread and wine on the altar at Mass remained a beautiful symbol of our

fellowship in Christ but not the Body and Blood of the God-Man (The Mystery of Transubstantiation). Perhaps it would have been easier if there were no religion at all and that mankind just works out his own destiny; but there is a Mystery of Creation, a Mystery of Redemption, a Mystery to the Problem of Evil, and the Mystery of why God would die on a Cross for the salvation of souls in time and place and why God would constitute a divine agency on earth for that purpose until the end of time (The Mystery of the Church). Oh, some days I wish it could have been easier. "We'd all get along so much better without all of these Mysteries." Really? Actually, I don't think so. And more to the point, that's NOT what God did. So, let's take a look at the Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity as revealed by God and not manipulated by my own personal opinions about how I would have determined history or doctrine. And, to my point about Wandering versus Wondering, it takes real humility to acknowledge that history of revelations by Jesus to mankind through the Church is not MY choice but His. And I accept this on trust that everything He said, everything He did, everything He continues to do, is the truth. Whether I choose to accept that on faith is the difference between humility or its counter: pride.

Having talked at length about Mystery, let's apply the nature of Mystery to our own human experience. Let's begin NOT with what we don't know but what we DO know about human relationships, just naturally speaking, and see how it plays out in relation to God's nature as Three Persons in One.

So, there's Myself (one person), You (another Person), and the Relationship itself between Me and You (a kind of third person going on there). In other words, there's ME, there's YOU, and there's Me-AND-You. It's the "AND" between "Me" and "You" which is something entirely unique which isn't the same between ME and somebody else. What's between Me and You in this relationship or that relationship is a real and powerful relationship which is itself neither ME nor YOU but the bond that identifies ME and YOU. Call that relationship Friendship, or Marriage, or Bond, or Synergy (as they say), or whatever. But call that reality between Me and You something. It's a real experience of something personal, but real. Real, true friends get this. True, real couples in marriage get this. We all know through experience something which is neither Me nor You but something personal BETWEEN us.

Now, Jesus reveals to us that God is Love. Now, love if it is TRUE love is unconditional -- not the stuff of "Luv" with its conditions, selfish or self-serving motives, manipulative or deceitful machinations. No, pure love. So, in our human experience, if I really love myself, I will reach out in love to you, and you so love me so that the fruit of our love is something so personal and real and very special between us; in fact, it's uniquely OURS. Now, that's what's going on in part, I think, with the Holy Trinity. The Father so loves the Son, and the Son so loves the Father, that the fruit of that experience of divine love is their unique relationship, namely, the Holy Spirit. And a perfectly supreme being must be eternal, then the Love which is God, and the God who is Love, is eternal, So, the love of the Father, who loves the Son, and the Love of the Son, who perfectly loves the Father, and the Fruit of that Love which is the Holy Spirit between them must ALL be eternal and therefore One. One, Eternal, Divine, Perfect Love. Isn't that neat?! And what's even incredibly "neat" is that if the human being is made in the image and likeness of God, then you and I are destined to love like God. Wow! I'm always destined, purposed, created, designed, made to love: to love Myself, to love You, and to love the relationship between us. And all of this is done more beautifully when we love with the Love of God which graces our individual love and elevates it to a more powerful dimension and purpose.

Now, the love of God, we said, is eternal. It is also, as perfectly eternal, therefore, universal. That is, the love of God knows no end. It's not just THIS love or THAT love, the way human beings love. For example, I love this particular person or that particular person, and each relationship is a bit different in love. Yet, we can also love THEM. I love, for example, my family, as family. I love my teachers, as teachers, I love those who serve in the armed forces as soldiers and sailors. I can love THEM, even if I don't know THEM personally, whoever THEY may be, with the Love of God. I can unite my own particular love to God's universal love for all, and participate in the Love of God for THEM. I can, then, love all human beings. And I can love them with the love of God which perfect. I don't think I can, we say. And, yes, I can't love perfectly even myself, let alone my wife or husband or child or teacher or even your pastor! (God knows even I can't love my parishioners perfectly!) But when unite my own little love to His and hand over my love to Him, He can do that work for me, for THEM. And this is the power of prayer. I offer my love through prayer, unite my love with His in the perfect power of His Sacrifice for THEM, living or dead, black or white, rich or poor,

Christian or not, young and old, healthy and sick. And I can do this by taking part in the powerful love of God manifest in their divine experience which is the Holy Spirit. See, I can get wrapped up in the reality of God through the Holy Spirit who is God, that Third Person who is One God. That's a Mystery Novel I just can't put down! Can't wait to see how it all ends! (Well, that's for later!) But it's worked out at the Mass, so stay in touch with us to see how it unfolds in a minute.

Ok, you say, that's enough for today! See, that's what a real, intelligent, exciting mystery does. It causes you to think, to stretch your mind, to imagine the possibilities, and to probe things which are not customary or the day-to-day stuff of life. Time for a break.

My point to all of this is that you can love with the Love of God. God so loved the world. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son ... that the world could be saved through Him." Get caught up in the love of God which is one, eternal, and universal. If you really want to love, then love as does God who unconditionally surrenders Himself in the outpouring of His love for the Father, the Father for the Son, and the real and powerful love between them who is the Holy Spirit, who loves you even now and forever. Try to love a little more like that. You can. The Holy Spirit will be your Advocate to that end. He promised it that way. You better believe it. Love of that sort can change lives, love of that sort can heal wounds and divisions between people and races, love of that sort never fails. God who is true love is patient, and kind, compassionate, forgiving, not vengeful, not counting transgressions, not pompous or conceited, not deceitful, not angry.

Oh, you can begin to see how this incredible Mystery of Love of the Holy Trinity of God has real impact for the world today and in our time and in our nation. As you Wonder as you Wander today, reflect on the perfect love of God and what that should mean for you and for us all. Looking for love? Wonder about the nature of God who is true love and you'll begin to see that this Mystery of the Holy Trinity is so intelligent, so beautiful, so life-changing, so life-giving, so life-saving.

God love you. God love the world. God save us through the love of your divine Son.

All glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.