

“Who among us understands the almighty Trinity? Yet who among us does not speak of it, if it indeed be the Trinity he speaks of?” This is Saint Augustine in his spectacular poem/lecture called “Confessions.” If one of the greatest minds in the history of the world is so cautious, how can I feel confident? Is the Trinity forever beyond my reach? It can’t be. This would make God some sort of a cruel joker. So, why did God tell us about Himself so much? Why do we have to know his nature? He must know that we don’t have the vocabulary or minds capable of describing it. He must know that we had to create a special language just to talk about him. Why then, did he tell us that?

Since we are reading Saint Augustine’s “Confessions,” here is my personal confession: I am most frustrated by the people in my life who pre-package reality for me. I’m sure you know the type: those who explain to you things in “doses” so you don’t get “overloaded.” Those who present people to you in simple sound bites. Those who make sure that you don’t get too shocked by the complexity and richness of life. The never-ending flow of impersonal politeness, easily accessible wisdom, conflict-free relationships. I cannot stand this because I know I am being manipulated; I just cannot quite understand how. I feel like I am being tamed before I can meet real human beings. When this happens, I feel like I’m suffocating, entangled in some invisible nets, like my relationships are fake, like my discoveries are obvious to everybody else, and like all my actions are pre-programmed to serve somebody else. I guess that’s what Karl Marx called “alienation.” He thought the owners of the means of production impose it on the working people. I know that’s what false friends do to me.

God is not a false friend. He is not a plutocrat who runs this world by the oppression of the working class. He is not an evil adviser who by the system of custom-tailored lies and illusions keeps me happy and dependent on himself. God is a real friend. “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.” He wants to be known for who He is, and the way He is, no matter how difficult it could be for us to handle. He is like an unexpected friend you just met. Everything about him seems too good to be true but somehow never stops being true. He is like a wonderful friend who feels like we’ve known each other for ages but who would never allow any lies in our conversations, even if it made our friendship feel more comfortable. He knows how much his identity, his nature, and his way of behaving changes the relationship for us. So he, in this amazing desperate gesture of friendship, tells us simply who he is and then patiently keeps explaining the details. Meeting a friend like this could be very terrifying, but missing him is, for sure, much worse. A friend like this escapes all the categories, all the so-called wisdom I have acquired so far. He is so intensely real that I can either believe him or reject him and remain in my little world of illusion. To believe him, however, means that I have to go on a long journey of listening and learning. I will have to enter the relationship that will question me to the very depth of my soul. To meet God, somebody who is so different from us, I need to allow myself to be transformed by Him. Saint Augustine was very much aware of it. If you don’t believe me, read his Book XIII of “Confessions.” You will enter the world of beauty and sophistication, of delicate reasoning, of passionate hope. And above all, you will enter the world of longing, the way you long after a true friend.

This is why God introduced himself to us, so that we can start meeting him already in our little way. Wherever we are, whenever we decide to allow His bold introduction to speak to us. God is the Trinity. One in three. The same but distinct. Inexhaustible giving and endless receiving. The love of the Father and of the Son, of the Holy Spirit given to us.

Here we also discover the reason why good old Karl Marx was wrong. There is no alienation in God's world. If I experience alienation, it is because I created it for myself. If I want to break out of it, the only thing I have to do is to tear down the delusions of my self-sufficiency and perfection and kneel before the powerfully inviting Mystery of the Divine Trinity. I can do it any time and in any place, no matter how important I am and no matter my life history. It could be a simple sign of the cross at the beginning of the day, or an unexpected reflection at the baptism of my child. It could even be some desperate attempt to explain to myself how could the Three be One. If I approach it with humility and honesty, and if I listen to my Friend, I will meet him.

“Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! Behold, you were within me, while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you. They kept me far from you, those fair things which, if they were not in you, would not exist at all. You have called to me, and have cried out, and have shattered my deafness. You have blazed forth with light, and have shone upon me, and you have put my blindness to flight! You have sent forth fragrance, and I have drawn in my breath, and I pant after you. I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst after you. You have touched me, and I have burned for your peace.”

Thank you, Saint Augustine, for helping us to meet your Friend.