

Homily Helps on Marriage and the Family: Considerations to Assist Homily Preparation

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

Sunday May 26, 2013

Reading 1: Proverbs 8:22-31

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Reading 2: Romans 5:1-5

Gospel: John 16:12-15

Note: The points below need not be covered in one homily alone, but could be used over time.

Preparation

- *Recommended Reading:*
 - *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan* (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/love-and-life/upload/pastoral-letter-marriage-love-and-life-in-the-divine-plan.pdf>). In particular, consider the section on “Marriage as a Reflection of the Life of the Trinity,” p. 35f.
 - *Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily* (<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/upload/usccb-preaching-document.pdf>). In particular, consider the section on “The Sunday Homily, Doctrine, and the Church’s Catechesis,” p. 21f, with reflection on the pattern of preaching exemplified by St. Paul: “...announcing the mysteries of redemption and then drawing out the meaning of these mysteries for Christian life...” (pp. 22-23).
- *Pray, Meditate, Contemplate the Word*
- *Come Holy Spirit*

The Word of God

- The readings and the Gospel for this Sunday all speak about the mystery of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the central mystery of our faith.
- The reading from Proverbs speaks of the wisdom of God in vivid, personal terms. Wisdom is a person, not a thing. Wisdom was with the Lord from the beginning, before creation, “when there were no depths.” This hearkens back to the first verses of Genesis, when the Spirit of God moved over the waters. The Father is never “alone”—he is not solitary. We can see in various places of the Old Testament the mystery of the Trinity foreshadowed as it were, anticipated, waiting to be fully revealed in Christ Jesus, the Son of the Father. God is not an impersonal being or a solitary person.
- In St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, we hear Paul speaking of the peace with God that has been gained through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This faith, a gift of God, is accompanied by the gifts of hope and love. In fact, “the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” It is through the Holy Spirit, whom we receive in Baptism, that we receive God’s love and very own life. Paul knew that God is not “alone” or solitary but a communion of Persons.

- In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus tells his disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who will share with the disciples what he takes from Jesus. Jesus also speaks of his Father, teaching that “everything that the Father has is mine.” This is an amazing intimacy and mystery, something that the Church, like Mary, received, pondered, and lived, and of which she continued to grow in understanding and in love. Constantly throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus’ intimacy with and dependence upon God as Father, “Abba,” and we also see Jesus’ intimacy with and reliance upon the Holy Spirit who was present at the very beginning of the mystery of the Incarnation, overshadowing Mary when she said yes to the Lord’s plan communicated to her by Gabriel. Jesus’ whole life gradually reveals the inner mystery of God’s life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Again, we see in Jesus that God is a communion of Persons.
- Lastly, in the midst of these richly dense passages of the inspired Word of God, we have the Responsorial Psalm indicating how wonderful is the name of the Lord and with what great dignity he has created the human person, being “little less than the angels.” This Psalm takes us back to Genesis ... to the creation of man, male and female, in the image of God. The glory of God somehow shines in us, in who we are, as male and female. In other words, the mystery of who we are, our very identity, is inseparable from who God is. This means, if we are created by God and in his image, the more we know who God is, the more we know who we ourselves are.
- To know and love God for who he is, and to love one another—this is what we have been made for. We have been made by and for God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Mystery of the Trinity

- The Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity has a claim on all of our hearts. All of us who have been baptized have God dwelling in our hearts, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Think about that for a moment in light of who we know God to be through faith. *God does not need us*. When he created the world and us, he was not a “loner” that needed a companion. God is eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He *is* love (1 Jn 4:8, 16), as St. John teaches us. God is a communion of Persons. This means that God created us out of love ... he loved us into existence, and his love sustains our very being. And not only that, but *he seeks us out*. He wants us to know him, to love him. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).
- When the Church teaches that the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life (CCC, no. 261), this is not just a nice concept or something to memorize in our heads. It is *everything* and touches every aspect of our lives. God who is love pours his love and divine life into our hearts through the sacraments. Every prayer we pray is Trinitarian, even when we pray specifically to only one of the Divine Persons. At every Mass, we praise and worship the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The Sign of the Cross is in the name of the Most Holy Trinity. Doctors of the Church (e.g., St. Bonaventure) have described how “footprints” or “vestiges” of the Trinity can be found in all of creation.
- The Triune God is not an abstract or distant mystery. What our Psalm today, read in light of our Christian faith, teaches us in a striking way is that it is especially in the human person that the glory of God—the glory of God’s Triune mystery—can somehow be glimpsed. The human person, created male and female in the image of God.

Points Connecting to Marriage and the Family

- It is a wonderful mystery that we can see something of the Triune God really reflected and lived out in a concrete and special way *in the Christian family*, founded on the unique covenant and gift of self between husband and wife.
- This should not be a surprise, since God himself not only willed marriage to be at the very creation of human life, but also willed to reveal himself throughout salvation history as Bridegroom of his people.
- *Background:* Marriage is inextricably tied to God's revelation of himself, as Sacred Scripture attests (e.g., see Genesis, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Song of Songs, the Gospels, Ephesians, Revelation). God's covenant with his people Israel is a marriage covenant. God is the bridegroom, and Israel is the (often unfaithful) bride. This covenant is consummated in the wedding feast of the Lamb – Christ the Bridegroom seals the new and eternal Covenant with his blood on the Cross. The blood he shed gives life to the Church, his Bride. The Church Fathers would describe the Church as being born from the pierced heart of Christ on the Cross. Her whole identity is received through Christ's gift of self. As Bride, she responds in faith to the Word entrusted to her and gives birth to new children for his Kingdom through the grace of the sacraments (especially Baptism). As Mother, she nurtures them with the truth of the Lord's teaching. Revealed truth builds upon and transcends natural truth. Without understanding the basic natural meaning of marriage, the entire Judeo-Christian religious heritage becomes incomprehensible.
- Male and female are made in the image of God—they are equal in dignity but different. Through their difference and complementarity, a man and a woman are able to form a unique and lifelong communion of persons—one that is truly two-in-one-flesh, a total gift of self to the other.
- The communion of persons found in marriage mirrors the mystery of the Trinity, even if obliquely. A husband and wife's communion respects each other, does not exhaust or consume each other, and leaves room for the *third* (the gift of a child). Their total, faithful and fruitful love, even when not blessed with a child, reflects the self-giving love in the Trinity. And that's an important point, especially for spouses who struggle with infertility and/or the loss of a child in the womb. Your loving communion is still a great gift and is called to be fruitful, even in the midst of your great pain and sorrow.
- When love becomes self-centered, it dies. Love is by nature outward-directed, a gift of self. We see this in God the Father who sends his Son for our sake and in the mystery of the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. God's actions toward us reveal the self-giving, outward-directed love that is the mystery of the Triune God's inner life. The bond of husband and wife is built upon the gift of self, open to one's spouse and open to the child, and not enclosed in on itself. It is a love at the service of communion.
- The family is a school of love, of forgiveness, of communion. The Christian family is meant to shine God's love within and without, to proclaim the mystery of the Trinity to the world. Of course, all of us in some way or another have been affected by brokenness in family life and have experienced in some way the pain of troubled or broken marriages. Let this not keep us from the family of God, the Church! Let this not keep us from striving to reach out to those who are lonely, hurting, and in need of our Father's love and mercy. And let this not keep us from doing what we can, even in the midst of a broken family, to seek the Lord's healing and reconciliation so that our families might become schools of redemption.
- Within our families, as imperfect as they may be, lies the pulse of the New Evangelization: *to turn to the Lord and seek his face in one another*—in our spouses, children, parents and

grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and cousins—and by so doing, to witness to the communion we have been made for in God through the Church.

- So on this Trinity Sunday, it is appropriate to recall the words of Bl. John Paul II and proclaim with renewed fervor: *Families, become what you are!* Husbands and wives, become what you are! You have been called to a great mission of love and communion. The Church needs you. Thank you for your witness and sacrifice. All of us, whether married or not, have a blessed obligation to support you and witness to this truth. All of us come from families. All of us are called to the great family of God, the Church, through which we share in the divine life of the Trinity.
- And lastly, let me speak a word of invitation to any of you who are or who know a fellow Catholic who is separated, divorced, married outside the Church, or in some similar situation. Please know you are part of the Church and are always welcome. Even if you are in a situation that keeps you from receiving Holy Communion, the Church welcomes you and loves you. If you haven't already, please also know that you can come to me and talk about any questions you might have or you can invite someone you know who might be struggling to talk to me. Some situations—not all—can be remedied in a few steps. Others may take more time. I am sure we know some who have left the Church for various reasons related to a marital situation. May we all seek to love our brothers and sisters who have left the Church for whatever reason, and, through the good grace of our loving Father who sent his only Son to redeem the world and poured out his love through the Holy Spirit, may they be loved back to the Church, the sacrament of communion with God and of unity among all persons (CCC, no. 775).