

Homily for Trinity Sunday 2021

The late Father Karl Rahner is considered by many to be one of the finest Christian scholars of the last century. A German Jesuit priest, he wrote many highly acclaimed theological works and served as an invaluable advisor to the German bishops at the Second Vatican Council, which began in 1962 and ended in 1965. Rahner was surely not alone in wrestling with the meaning of the Trinity, the central mystery of the Christian faith. Christians are baptized in the name of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Father Rahner was once asked by a priest friend how he should explain the Trinity when preaching. His reply was short and simple: “Don’t bother”. A mystery is something that can be known only through faith. Christians believe that God himself has taught us how to speak of him.

A story attributed to Saint Augustine illustrates the above point. He was walking by the seashore one day hoping to conceive of an explanation of the Triune God.

As he walked along, he saw a boy on the beach, pouring seawater from a shell into a small hole in the sand. “What are you doing, my child?” asked Saint Augustine.

“I am trying to empty the sea into this hole”

“But that is impossible”.

The boy stood up, looked straight into the eyes of Augustine and replied, “What you are trying to do--- comprehend the mystery of God with your small head is even more impossible”.

Then the boy vanished. According to the legend, the child was an angel sent by God to teach Augustine a much needed lesson in humility.

God dwells in unapproachable light.

We are surrounded by mystery. Consider some of nature’s mysteries such as light, matter, and gravity and the complexity of the human brain and eye. Why does a man choose to marry one particular woman rather than another? How does one account for a priestly vocation or the reason why there is human life at all?

Even Albert Einstein, arguably the greatest scientist of the twentieth century, acknowledged the mystery in life and scolded those who had no patience for those who, for whatever reason, are dismissive of the miraculous dimension of life.

The English writer and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis once remarked that the most frequently spoken word in heaven would be “oh”, as in “Oh, now I understand” or “Oh, now I see”. In this earthly pilgrimage we walk by faith, not by knowledge. In eternity, we will have a much clearer vision of the mystery of the One God-- - Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.

What has God deigned to reveal to the human family?

First, God is a person, and not a mathematical formula or an anonymous force. He knows us and loves us. He speaks to us as a parent speaks to their children.

God is not a solitary being. He is a communion of three divine persons. The loving relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the very essence of God. We live in the family of God, who is a Trinity of love.

God himself is relationship. As human beings we are created in God's image and likeness. We, too, are relational creatures. We are so often identified by our personal relations to others. We are fathers and mothers, nieces and nephews, sons and daughters.

God is love. As Peter Kreeft notes in his book "Catholic Christianity", "Love requires twoness, in fact threeness: the lover, the beloved, and the act, or relationship of love between them. God is Trinity because God is love itself in its completeness".

Heady stuff, yes?

In conclusion, let me share with you a humorous story told by a Cistercian monk, Father Thomas Keating, in a sermon he once delivered on Trinity Sunday.

"I once heard a story about a storefront hospitality center in Minneapolis that served as a coffee shop for the homeless and provided a staff to converse with them. One of the staff members noticed a homeless man who impressed him as very spiritual. In one of their conversations he said, "I think you would like to read this spiritual book" and handed him one by Thomas Merton, one of the great spiritual writers in the recent past. "I really don't want to read it", the man replied. But the staff member forced it on him, so the man finally took the book and was gone for a couple of days. Eventually he showed up with the book and handed it back to the staff person, saying, "I really can't read this. Anyone who really knows about God keeps his mouth shut."

Let us all be content with contemplating the mystery of God, even if we can't fully understand the central dogma of our Catholic faith.