

### **THE TRINITY, A MYSTERY, A REALITY**

Much of what I am writing about for this Mountain Echoes comes from Fr. Daniel Durken, a Benedictine monk and a retired professor of Theology living at St. Johns Abbey at Collegeville, Minnesota. For some years he was also director of their Liturgical Press. He has written extensively on a variety of scriptural, liturgical and other subjects. His writings are always a pleasure to read excelling in clarity.

The Trinity: the greatest mystery of our Catholic Faith. It is very interesting to note that the word Trinity is nowhere to be found in Sacred Scripture. Jesus never used the word; St. Paul and St. Peter never used the word in their writings or in their preaching. The words they did use are "Father, Son, and Spirit" These words speak the truth about the Trinity, namely God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three of these concepts are together as one entity, namely God. Jesus, in many places in the Gospels, says time and again that he and the Father are one, or that he who knows me knows my Father. And at the Last Supper, Jesus talked about sending the Paraclete and the way He talked about the Paraclete was indicating that some- how he and the Paraclete were one.

It took the Church almost three hundred years before the Church and Theologians became comfortable in expressing belief in three distinct persons in one God. Eventually, it was not a pope but a layman, the emperor Constantine, who convoked the first universal or ecumenical council of the church's bishops in the year 325 at Nicaea which is in present day northwest Turkey. It was there that all present affirmed and decreed belief in the "one Lord, Jesus Christ, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father." Simply put, Jesus is divine; Jesus is God. If these words sound familiar they are in the Nicene Creed which we all profess every Sunday at Mass

It was a few years later, in 381, that the Council at Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) affirmed the divinity of the Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified." Again note that this has been inserted into the Nicene Creed said at Mass. Seventy years later at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the unity of Jesus was clarified by describing Jesus as one person in two natures, the divine and the human. Thus all the theological and philosophical pieces of the God puzzle were put together and called "Trinity."

This Sunday we celebrate the feast of the Holy Trinity and it is with joy and gratitude that the full meaning of Trinity has been clarified and confirmed by the discussions and agreements of the early Church Councils, the forerunners of the Second Vatican Council which took place in our generation. What we really see is the way God works through his Church to teach and clarify more precisely each time the elements of our Faith. It is God's way of always keeping his Church up-to-date with each culture and with the progress in human thinking, while at the same time stressing that the fundamental teaching of Jesus and the Gospels is still very much relevant in every age. There will always be those who will object, or who think things are getting too liberal and that the Church should go back to former days when they claim everything was much clearer. This is certainly true today with all the clamor about liturgy and how it is getting very much out of hand. Back to Latin and

to the way Mass was celebrated in the early nineteen hundreds! Many find this so distressing and wonder about the wisdom of it all. What they forget is that the Holy Spirit is still very much in charge and that the Trinity is still very much leading the Church Jesus founded. This is still very much our Faith!

We end every celebration of Mass with the words, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. All our prayers in one way or another are not concentrated on the mysterious God so far-far away but rather on the Trinity who not only lives with us but within us. Never forget the words of Jesus: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love you, and we will come to you and make our dwelling with you." Words from the Gospel of John.

At this point it might be well to listen to a Jesuit Priest, Father Thomas Rausch, S.J. writing in his book *Catholicism in the Third Millennium*.

"We do not always recognize this divine indwelling. It is not God's distance but God's very nearness that makes it so hard for us to be aware of God's presence. God surrounds us, more closely than the air we breathe. And we are no more aware of God's sustaining presence than the fish is aware of the sustaining waters of the sea. Prayer puts us in touch with that divine life."

Another author, Anne Hunt in a manuscript on *Faith Seeking the Light: The mystery of the Trinity in Image and Word*, quoted by Fr. Dan Durken, writes:

"Whether or not we are actually aware of it, the Trinity is to each of us as air is to the birds of flight or as water is to the fish of the sea. We live our lives in an ocean that is the mystery that is the Trinity. As it says in Acts, "It is the mystery in which we live and move and have our being." The Trinitarian prayers of the Eucharistic Liturgy wash over us as if we were floating in a fountain, supported by water, surrounded by water, washed over, nourished and refreshed by water."

"Just as we sometime say to someone we love dearly that he or she means the world to us, so is this truly what the Trinity is to us. The Trinity means the world to us; it is where we, together with all creation, live and move and have our being. The Trinity is the origin of our being, the source of our life, our destiny, our home."

The Trinity will always remain a profound mystery. How it actually works is beyond our comprehension for it is the very nature of God that one faces and tries to understand. The Trinity is not something thought up by man. Such a concept is far beyond human intelligence. It has been revealed by Jesus as the nature of the Divine in his recorded teachings and words, particularly in insisting that he and his father are one, one in every conceivable way. Likewise, with his words about the Paraclete. And then there are the two epiphanies of the Trinity, the first when Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan when a voice came from heaven and a dove appeared over his head. Again it happened when Jesus took his three main apostles, Peter, James and John, to the top of Mount Tabor where he was suddenly transfigured and stood there with absolute brilliance, speaking to Moses and Elijah when out of the cloud once again came the voice of God, "This is my beloved son; listen to him." How fortunate we are today to recall this marvelous divine description of who and what our God

truly is, and what awaits each of us in eternity. Then as John says, "we will see God as he is and we will see that we are like him." What this means is simply indescribable!

Fr. Andy, S.J.