

Trinity Sunday, Year C  
Prov 8:22-31  
Ps 8 *passim*  
Rom 5:1-5  
Jn 16:12-15

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The first Sunday after Pentecost is always observed as Trinity Sunday. For one particular Sunday the Church invites us to focus more sharply on the mystery of the Trinity.

Let's begin by thanking God for revealing the divine Self to us. God has revealed Himself in His word, in the words of Holy Scripture, in the handiwork of His creation, and most fully in His Son, the Word made flesh.

God has revealed Himself as One. Over and over again the Hebrew Scriptures (what we call the Old Testament) affirm God's oneness. The Jewish people pray continually the Shema prayer, from the Book of Deuteronomy [6:4]: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one!" And yet there are places in the Hebrew Scriptures, like our first reading today from the Book of Proverbs, that seem to describe some attribute of God – sometimes it God's holiness, God's justice, or God's glory – as having a separate existence. In our Proverbs reading, it's God's wisdom. Wisdom is described as a lovely and powerful woman. God's first act of creation is pouring out His wisdom. God delights in Lady Wisdom and together God and Lady Wisdom delight in His creation.

We don't find the word Trinity anywhere in Scripture. It is a doctrine of the Church, a doctrine first articulated nearly three centuries after the death and resurrection of Christ. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the fruit of deep reflection, fierce debate, and long struggle. Out of that struggle came the Creed we recite on Sunday. But the Creed itself does not use the word Trinity. Further development was required. And here's where we ended up: there is a oneness to God we call God's nature, and a threeness to God we call person. But it's important that we remember that the word Trinity and the doctrine of the Trinity came to be because the Christian community first experienced the threeness of God, even while holding firmly to the oneness of God.

We experience the great transcendent God who is Lord over all, the God who is out there, above everything, and beyond everything. We experience God-with-us in Jesus the Christ, the God who walks beside us and suffers with us. And we experience God as the Holy Spirit, the God who dwells within us and acts in and through the Church. We as Church marinated in our threefold experience of God for close to 300 years. Some of us took some wrong turns along the way (and some of us still do) but eventually we settled on calling the oneness of God nature and the threeness of God person.

Jesus, in our third reading from the Gospel of John, tells us that the Church's understanding of God's Self-revelation will grow over time, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whom he calls "the Spirit of truth."

None of the Gospels record that Jesus ever used the word Trinity. However, at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew [28:19] he addresses his apostles for the last time before ascending into heaven, and he exhorts them to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Notice he didn't say "in the *names* of . . ." No, in the *name* of – singular. Out of this the Church came to understand that the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit each possess the fullness of divinity while each exists as a distinct person. The Church could remember that Jesus said [Jn 10:30], "The Father and I are one" and make some sense of it because of the doctrine of the Trinity.

I say "some sense of it" because we are dealing with a deep mystery. The reality of God far surpasses the ability of the human intellect, with all our limitations, to grasp. But that just means that we can never – not on this side of the grave anyway – reach the end-point of fully understanding the mystery of the Trinity.

In the passage from the Letter to the Romans that we heard this afternoon, St. Paul notes that because of God's love and God's promises, we live in the expectation of experiencing the glory of God. He calls it hope. The inevitable pains and disappointments and struggles that are part of human life contribute to that hope. Suffering can make us bitter, hard, and isolated. But at its best, our afflictions make for endurance, St. Paul says, endurance makes for character tested in fire, and proven character makes for hope, because Jesus has blazed the trail and the Holy Spirit has poured out the Father's love upon us.

Way back in the 5th century, St. Augustine started his reflection on the Holy Trinity by remembering that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. What puts us in the image and likeness of God, Augustine thought, is our intelligence (that is, our capacity to know and understand) and our will, by which we love and choose. So, God knows and God loves. But, leaving aside the created world, what is there for God to know? The answer is Himself. And, God being perfect and complete and infinite, the self-knowledge of God is so utterly perfect as to generate a second person, whom we call the Son. And the love between Father and Son is so utterly perfect and complete as to give rise to the Holy Spirit.

If we accept what St. Augustine taught, which hardly explains the Trinity and barely scratches below the surface of the mystery, we find that the doctrine of the Trinity describes God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – as a community of relationship in self-pouring love. We are invited to enter into that relationship, into the community of self-pouring love, and ultimately into God’s glory.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.