

Trinity Sunday of Lent – Homily by Fr. Dan Donovan (May 31, 2015)

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the **Christian understanding** of God is the conviction that he is, in some sense, **both one and three**. Christian monotheism, Christian belief in the oneness of God, is rooted in the biblical tradition. “Hear O Israel,” Moses declared, “the Lord our God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with your soul and with all your might.” The biblical God is both the **creator** and the **Lord of human history**.

Meditating on the life, teaching and destiny of Jesus, Christians came to recognize that, in him, the creator God was present in our midst in a unique and previously unheard of way. In Jesus God reveals himself, offering us forgiveness and new life. We are only able, however, in Paul’s words to recognize God’s saving presence in Jesus through the gift of the Spirit. It is he who touches and transforms our hearts and draws us into relationship with Jesus and, in and through him, with the Father.

This sense of God as a **mystery of Father, Son and Spirit** permeates our religious language and ritual. It is in that **threefold name** that we were baptized, that we bless ourselves and one another and that we pray in the liturgy. The great

prayer at the heart of the Mass, the **Eucharistic prayer**, is directed to the Father with, through and in Christ, in the unity and the power of the Holy Spirit.

If the language of Father, Son and Spirit evokes the self-giving relationships that define the inner life of God, it also, and in an even more direct fashion, points to the various ways in which God relates to us.

Our faith is rooted in the Bible. Although we think of it as a book, it is in fact a collection of books, 46 in the Catholic Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Written over a very long time and in different contexts, the books vary among themselves in style, type and message. The Old Testament embraces prose and poetry, history and legend, prayers and prophetic oracles, wisdom teachings and popular proverbs. The New Testament includes accounts of the public life of Jesus and of the history of the early church, letters and apocalyptic visions of the heavenly world and of the end times.

When church leaders in the early centuries tried to bring together in a brief formula the essential teachings of the Bible, they produced creeds like the Apostles' Creed, all of which were given a Trinitarian structure. They summarize biblical teaching around the activity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

One thing that has always struck me about the creeds is their **enormously positive emphasis**. They all begin with creation. “I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” Everything – from the greatest to the smallest, everything material and spiritual, all that lives and grows, human life in all its variety – everything, ultimately comes from and depends on God.

Although we can abuse the gifts given us, gifts of mind and imagination, of knowledge and creativity, and turn them against ourselves and others, our failures cannot undermine the fundamental goodness of God’s creation.

The **second part of the creed** focuses on **Jesus Christ** as Son of God and Saviour. In him, the Father reaches out to sinful humanity offering us forgiveness and reconciliation. In the Son’s taking on in Jesus of a life like ours, God has drawn near to all human life giving it an added dignity and value. In Christ we have the possibility of becoming the kind of good and decent, compassionate and loving people that God intended us to be from the beginning. Jesus’ death reveals the depth of God’s love for us while his resurrection opens a vision of our fulfillment and the fulfillment of the whole of creation in God.

The **third and final part of the creed** focuses on the Spirit and on the way in which the salvation won by the life and death of Jesus is brought to bear on us as individuals and as a community of faith.

The saving, revealing, life-giving activity of Christ as the incarnate Son of God remains alive and active in the world through the Spirit. In the words of today's reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God When we cry '**Abba,**' Father, it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are **children of God**, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

All things, the Bible affirms, come from and bear the mark of the creator God. Christ, as Paul once put it, is the "image of God, the first born of all creation ... Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

We are enabled to become part of the **great movement of reconciliation** through the gift of the Spirit. He draws us into the orbit of Christ in whom, in the end, we return to the God from whom we have come.