

## **Feast of the Holy Trinity**

Cycle A, 6.7.20

Exodus 34:4-6,8-9/

2 Corinthians 13:11-14, 12-13 John 3:16-18

### **LIVING THE TRIUNE LIFE OF GOD**

What a bald-faced invitation Moses extended to Yahweh in the Book of Exodus: *"If I find favor with you, O Lord, do come along in our company. This is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins and receive us as your own."* I would have been hard pressed to make the same request of God a week ago -- to be around us in the civil unrest and destruction that was taking place throughout our country. Now, a week later, I would ask God to walk with us. The curfews over several nights have made a difference. The looters who exploited the anger and confusion have done their damage. The intent of those who protest injustice is clearer. The marches and gatherings now are calmer; their purpose obvious: justice for a man whose life was unjustly taken and an end to the division and inequality in our communities.



In September, 2016, near the Washington Monument on the Capital Mall the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture took place. The official Smithsonian Museum website describes it as *a place where all Americans can learn about the richness and diversity of the African American experience, what it means to their lives and how it helped us shape this nation. A place that transcends the boundaries of race and*

*culture that divide us, and becomes a lens into a story that unites us all.* One of the tag lines on the news when it opened said: *"Museum offers a clear-eyed look at history which can make us uncomfortable."* As the "Black Lives Matter" movement gains momentum, many people in communities like ours are just that – uncomfortable. And until we get over that discomfort, this will be an "us and them" experience, and we will be the *stiff-necked* and *hard-headed* people, for whom Moses pleaded before God.



When the African-American Museum in D.C. opened, there was a lot of press about a report revealing the role of Jesuits in Maryland in owning and selling slaves in the 18th and 19th centuries. Georgetown University, founded by the Jesuits in 1789, depended in its early years on revenue from Jesuit plantations that operated with slave labor. In light of this revelation the Jesuits issued a statement: *We are disheartened by this history of moral blindness in the men and institutions we would otherwise hope to admire. The Society of Jesus wants to acknowledge and understand more deeply the sins and failures of our past ... to work all the more for racial and ethnic reconciliation.* Even men of the cloth, men as highly educated as Jesuits, could not, at that time, see the moral offense of slavery clearly for what it was. Most of our founding fathers,

freedom-loving men who came to this country to escape tyranny, were slave owners. The very land, our national mall, on which the museum was built, was once a site where black lives were bought and sold, traded like cattle and livestock.

The many artifacts in the museum make the visitor uncomfortable – like the thumb screws used for punishment; like the iron shackles that bound a slave’s feet and legs -- adult-sized and a smaller one for a child.



Seeing is believing and is the only way to enter into the experience of the 10.7 million African slaves who survived the dreaded “Middle Passage” of the slave ships. Not all of those slaves were brought to North America, but enough to make slave-trading a lucrative enterprise for landowners who needed large labor forces on their plantations and farms. The first public American document to protest slavery wasn’t discovered until 1844; it was written by four German Quakers in 1688, but ignored, archived and forgotten for 150 years.

The Civil War which ended in 1865 was fought to end slavery in America, but it didn’t win true freedom for our black and brown brothers and sisters. It took another century before schools were integrated in 1957, and the Civil Rights Act, which ended segregation in public places and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin,

was passed in 1964. The inequities and injustices still exist; we see them played out before our eyes. The current protests are made up of all races of people. This is our moment for recognizing our own collective guilt for the history of slavery and the aftermath of racism. We can’t excuse ourselves by saying *I wasn’t part of that history*. If we are here it is part of us. We need to acknowledge it, if we are to heal our national wounds.

Today’s Feast of the Holy Trinity can give us the impetus to heed the movement of the Spirit in our own day. What does this “three-in-oneness” of Father, Son and Holy Spirit model for us as we struggle to understand? The God we worship isn’t rigid, but always in motion, always **dynamic** – the love of the Father spills out into the Son, and their divine union sends forth the Spirit. It’s movement and flow. We who don’t like change, or are often reluctant to embrace what is new, what is unfamiliar or uncomfortable, are invited to enter into this Divine flow-- the dance of the Trinity – the God who is calling us to grow and evolve.



Our Triune God is **diverse**: each unique person of the Trinity has his own way of embodying and expressing goodness, beauty and love – the Father who sustains us, the Son who redeems us and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us and makes us holy. Their differences are not in tension with each other. They complement and fulfill. Given the racial divisions tearing our country apart at this very moment, God’s innate diversity can show us how to live gracefully and peaceably with difference.

Finally, our Triune God, by God’s very nature, is **communal**. Ever one, yet always three. God is relationship and intimacy, connection and community. Recall the beautiful image of the Baptism of our Lord as Jesus comes out of the water: the voice of the Father is heard -- *This is my Beloved Son* -- and the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove. A perfect community of love. If God is interactive at God’s very heart, then we who worship the Triune God can’t isolate ourselves from each other or from anyone. When we prioritize our individual “rights” over our care and concern for the most vulnerable among us we betray the very sign which marks us as Christian. You and I have been brought to birth in the love of the Triune God at a time when our world is reeling and desperate. Let that love flow through you and spill out to others, melting hardened hearts and showing us the face of God on all our brothers and sisters. May we reflect in our own words and deeds the dynamic and diverse community that is the life of our Triune God.



In the fourth century, St. Augustine wrote this prayer to the Trinity. May it inspire our search for God:

*Lord our God, we believe in you,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit ...  
Give me the strength to seek you,  
you who granted me the grace of finding you  
and gave me the hope of finding you  
forever more.  
Before you is my strength  
as well as my weakness:  
keep my strength, heal my weakness.  
Before you is my knowledge  
as well as my ignorance:  
There where you have opened to me,  
welcome me when I want to enter.  
There where you have closed to me,  
open to me when I come to knock...  
Let me remember you!  
Let me understand you!  
Let me love you!  
AMEN!*

*John Kasper, OSFS*