

HOMILY ON THE TRINITY SUNDAY

PREAMBLE: In this reflection, the effort is not to convince anybody beyond doubt or with scientific precision or to demystify this age long mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, to do that requires a divine being whom I am not. A mystery ceases to be mystery if it could be understood by man. It is a mystery because it is beyond human comprehension.

There is this well-known story of St. Augustine and the Holy Trinity when he was working on his book: De Trinitate. The story has it that St. Augustine was contemplating on the rationality behind the teaching on the Most Blessed Trinity. He was wondering, 'how can one say that there is one God if the Father is truly God, the Son truly God and the Holy Spirit truly God? He was still pondering this in his mind as he walked pass a very big river, he saw an angel who disguised himself as a little boy. Having made a very small hole away from the coast, the angel repeatedly fetched water from the river with his tiny cup and emptied it in the small hole he made over the coast. His aim was to empty the river into the small hole. St. Augustine watched him do that couple of time and as he could not fathom what the little boy was doing, he asked: 'What are doing young boy? The small boy refusing to be distracted by the question continued his business. But when Augustine persisted in his question the young boy said to him, please sir, I have no time for discussion of any sort because I have a little time left and I must empty the water in this river today into that mighty hole I made out there. Augustine was infuriated by the stupidity of the boy and asked, 'have you no brain?' How do you think you can empty this mighty flowing river with your tiny cup and even if it is possible, how do you imagine that your tiny hole would contain all the water in this mighty river? The young boy replied, and how do think that can understand the immensity of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity in your tiny and finite brain? And the angel disappeared. And after pondering for some time over what the little boy told him, he looked around to ask him further question but the boy (angel) had disappeared.

The word Trinity is not found in the scripture but many passages especially in the NT show that there are three Divine persons. The plurality of the persons in God can be found in the OT, in the creation account, where God says: '...let us make

man in our image (Gen. 1:26).’ The phrases ‘let us’ and ‘in our own image’ in this passage suggests plurality, not of God but of persons in God.

In the New Testament however, there are several passages where the persons of the Trinity was spoken about. Again, the word Trinity was not used. For instance, in the baptism of our Lord, when God the Son was coming out of the water, God the Holy Spirit rested on His shoulder in form of a dove and the voice of God the Father was heard, this is my beloved Son, my favor rests on Him (Mtt. 3:17). This same statement was repeated at the transfiguration, where He added, ‘listen to him’ (Mtt. 17:5; Lk.9:35), although the third person of the Blessed Trinity was not mentioned in the transfiguration episode as it was in the baptism.

Again, after His resurrection, Christ told His disciples, as He appeared to them, ‘all authorities in heaven and on earth has been given to me go therefore into the world and make disciples of all the nation, baptize them In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, behold **I AM** with you till the consummation of time (Mtt. 28:18-20).

Christ often mentioned to His apostles, ‘Unless I go the Father, the Advocate will not come, (Jn. 16:7). The Advocate whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and He will remind you all that I taught you, (Jn. 14:26).

‘When the Holy Spirit comes He will lead you to the complete truth since He will not be speaking of His own accord but will only say what He has been told. ...He will glorify me since all He will tell you will be taken from what is mine. Everything the Father has is mine and that is why I said that all He will say to you will be taken from what is mine’ (Jn. 16:12-15).

These and many more passages speak of the plurality of persons in God but no mention of the word Trinity is made in any of them. The word **Trias** which the Latin translates as **Trinitas** or **Trinity** in English, was first used by Theophilus of Antioch in the second century that is about A.D. 180. He speaks of "the Trinity of God as ‘the Father’, His Word, that is ‘the Son’ and His Wisdom, meaning the ‘Holy Spirit’ (To Autolycus II.15). Afterwards it appears in its Latin form of trinitas in Tertullian’s work (On Pudicity 21). In the next century the word is in general use. It is found in many passages of Origen ("In Ps. xvii", 15). The first creed in which it appears is that of Origen's pupil, Gregory Thaumaturgus. In his Ekthesis tes pisteos composed between 260 and 270, he writes:

There is therefore nothing created, nothing subject to another in the Trinity: nor is there anything that has been added as though it once had not existed, but had entered afterwards: therefore the Father has never been without the Son, nor the Son without the Spirit: and this same Trinity is immutable and unalterable forever (P.G., X, 986).

All these and many more great theologians and Fathers of the church spoke volumes in defense of the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity.

The passages quoted above may have given rooms for misconstruing or misunderstanding as some of them may suggest that one is subordinate to the other; that is seeing the Son as subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit subordinate to the Son. Here lies the mystery. All I can say here is that none is subordinate to the other since the three are coequal, coeternal and consubstantial as mentioned by St. Gregory in the above quotation. The church teaches us that the Holy Trinity is three distinct persons but one Godhead, undivided unity, consubstantial, coeternal and coequal in majesty. Both existed from eternity. When God creates the world, it is attributed to the Father, when He redeems man it is attributed to the Son and when He sanctifies man it is attributed to the Holy Spirit. Yet none acts in isolation of the other since these three are substantially one. When an act is performed by one it is performed by the three. St. Augustine says that the Father is the lover, the Son is the loved and the Holy Spirit is love that binds them together.

In His teaching, Christ always implied that He is coeternal with the Father: in His parting prayer to His Father He said, ‘...glorify me with the glory I have with you before time began (before the world was made), (Jn.17:5). And in another passage before Abraham was I AM (Jn. 8:58). Pointing out to the passage of the burning bush. ‘I AM WHO I AM’ ...TELL HIM THAT THE I AM sent you (Ex. 3 14). This passage suggests that the God who sent Moses in mount Horeb to confront Pharaoh is the same God who has come in the person of Jesus Christ. Again I and the Father are one, (Jn. 10:30), expressing the complete unity that exists between Him and the Father. He once reprimanded Philip, one of His apostles, for being slow to believe that He is completely one with the Father. ‘Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me (Jn. 14:10)?’

Effort to comprehend this mystery, I must confess, has led many astray. Among these is Arius, who argued that Christ is not God, not coeternal with the Father and by so doing, became one of the greatest heretics in the history. His heresy is named after him – Arianism. He taught that the Father is superior to the Son and the Son is superior to the Holy Spirit. This heresy led to the convening of the council of Nicene in the year 325 AD. In this council, St. Athanasius argued vehemently on the Holy Trinity. According to him, the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God yet there is one God not three. In this Trinity of persons, he said, the Son is the begotten of the Father by eternal generation, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son by eternal procession. Yet, notwithstanding this difference as to origin, the persons are coeternal and coequal. All alike are uncreated and omnipotent. This is the stand of the Church on the Trinity, this is her teaching, this is the revelation regarding God's nature which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came upon earth to deliver to the world: and which she proposes to man as the foundation of her whole dogmatic system.

The church begins almost every prayer with the invocation of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When the church wants to bless her children through her clergy, she does that in name of the Most Holy Trinity (The Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit). The sacrament of Baptism was conferred on us in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, observing the directives of Christ Himself: 'Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Each time we make the sign of the cross which is the sign of our salvation, we remind ourselves of the unity of essence and trinity of the persons in the Triune God.

TRINITARIAN CHARACTER OF EVERY FAMILY: Every family has a Trinitarian character: the father, the mother and the children. The love that exists between the husband and wife generates their children. We are expected to express the same love and unity that bind the Trinity together in perfect unity in our various families. May the Most Holy Trinity bind us together so that there will be unity in diversity. As there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God (Eph. 4:5), let us come together as one entity and we shall achieve a great feat.

HAPPY TRINITY SUNDAY