

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF PRAISE AND JOY

A reflection taken from a poem by St. Gregory of Nazianzen

To try to speak of the Godhead is like trying to cross the ocean on a homemade raft or to make wings to carry us to the stars. The heavenly beings aren't able to do this adequately. Please, Holy Spirit, help me to sound the Trumpet of Truth and lead all lovers of God to rejoice with their entire heart and self.

There is but one eternal God, uncaused and unlimited by any being that has existed or ever will exist. God is infinite and the mighty Father of a mighty Son begotten in the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is a divine Person but not another God. The Spirit is a divine Person but not another God. Both are equal to the Father, who remains wholly Father of the Son who in Him and through the Spirit creates the world.

We praise the Son, venerating the blood that expiated our sins, the blood of One who lost nothing of divinity when like a good physician he stooped to our festering wounds. Human yet God, of the race of Adam and David and yet their creator, the Son clothed himself in human flesh and had a mother—though she was a virgin. Both high priest and victim, the Son offered his blood to cleanse the whole world. Lifted up on the Cross, yet it was sin that was nailed to it, and the Son rose from the dead, raising also those who had died before him. Don't let the Son's humanity lead you wrongfully to detract from his divinity.

My soul, why do you hold back? Sing praise to the Holy Spirit as well, lest your speech tear asunder what is not separated by its nature. Let us tremble before the great and Holy Spirit who also is God and through whom we have come to know God. It is the Spirit who transforms us into God. The Spirit is the omnipotent bestower of divine gifts and the giver of life both in heaven and on earth. The Spirit is divine strength proceeding from the Father and yet subject to no power. The Spirit is not the Son, for there is only one Son, but the Spirit shares equally in the glory of the Godhead.

In the One God we behold three pulsations, as it were. They move the universe. Through them each of us became and becomes ever more fully a new and different person. When we came forth from the baptismal font we left our death behind and entered into light. We were restored to life from the dead. If God cleansed us so completely then we must worship God with our entire being. It is this total giving of ourselves, through and in the Spirit, which gives us a joy that can transform us by leading us to love one another as the Son love us.

LIVING OUR GRATITUDE

A reflection by Fr. F.X. McGowan

We owe the Blessed Trinity the homage of a deeply grateful love. Think of what has been given us. The Heavenly Father adopted each one of us. The Son embraced us as brothers and sisters. The Holy Spirit chose us to be its Temple. Could the Triune God have done more for us? Suppose that we later lost our baptismal innocence and the happiness that goes with it. Didn't the Heavenly Father, in mercy and love, cleanse us again with the Son's blood? Didn't the Holy Spirit move us to sorrow and repentance? Didn't the Son draw us close yet again?

Yes, indeed, we have abundant reason to be thankful to the Holy Trinity for the love and mercy shown us. We have powerful reasons to love and honor the every-blessed Three and to offer thanks and the sincerest worship of our hearts. We may repeat the prophet's praise, "*Let all the earth adore you and sing your praise! Let us sing a psalm to your name, O Lord!*"

The Triune God infused into the commonness of our clay a spirit made in God's own image and likeness. As Tertullian reminds us, "*No one is so completely a father as the Heavenly Father*". And what is there that we don't owe God's Beloved Son, who came from glory to abase himself and take up our lowly state and live a life of persecution and suffering and death just so that we might share Heaven with him. What don't we owe the Holy Spirit who gave us light and understanding when we were blind and held us upright when we were weak, encouraged us when we were timid, brought us back to the fold when we had strayed and forgave us when we sinned?

Everywhere God's loving concern has followed us. God's loving voice has called to us no matter where we were. Recall the day of your baptism, how, as a child, you were carried helpless to the waters of rebirth. Others voiced the vows we were unable to speak and others showed us how to love so as to come to happiness forever. The grace of God restored the disfigured image we bore due to Adam's fault. Indeed, our God has been our truest, most faithful and loving friend.

Does the Triune God ask anything of us? Only that we live toward others the love we have been shown. Only that we share with others the joy that inspires our gratitude! God so loved the world as to give His Only Son. Let us so love our God as to give ourselves to loving in this same way.

TEACHING THE PATH TO GOD

A reflection from a sermon of St. Anthony of Padua

We have just celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit. Recall how the Holy Spirit gave the Lord's disciples the gift of speaking in various tongues. We too have received this gift. The different languages are our ways of witnessing to Christ. We speak the language of humility, of poverty, of patience and of obedience—some well and some not so well. We speak these languages when we practice the corresponding virtues. Actions speak louder than words. Our words should teach but they become effective teachers only when we act as we speak.

It is easy to be filled with words but empty of actions. The danger is that we will become like the fig tree the Lord cursed when he found no fruit on it but only leaves. St. Gregory pointed out that a law is laid upon preachers to practice what they preach. It is useless to flaunt knowledge of God's law if you undermine it by your actions. The first disciples received the Spirit and proceeded to speak as the Spirit gave them the gift. Happy are those whose words issue from the Holy Spirit.

People ordinarily speak as their character guides them to. If they take up the Lord's words, as preachers, but without acting on them and then claim these words as their own without acting out the good things they talk about they pass judgement on themselves. As the Lord said to Jeremiah, "I have a quarrel with prophets that steal words from one another and make prophecies out of lying dreams. They recount them as my words and lead my people astray with such lies and pretensions. I never sent them or commissioned them and they serve no good purpose for this People". That is what the Lord said long ago and repeats now to us.

We pray to speak as the Holy Spirit gives us the gift. It is a gift of speaking and acting according to what we are given to say. Such a humble and sincere request is for a fulfillment of the gift of Pentecost in us and in our lives. May God pour into us this grace and use our minds and senses to lead us to keep his commandments and show others how to do so as well.

Let us ask for a keen sense of sorrow and for something like fiery tongues in our keeping and confessing our faith in deeds. That is what brings one to the blazing splendor of a saint. That brings us to gaze upon the Triune God. More, it is what builds up those who see us, who live with us or work with us. What greater gift and blessing can we receive?

HOPE THAT TRUSTS FIRST IN THE LORD

A reflection developed from a sermon of St. Bernard

O Gerard, my brother, left to myself I wish that I had laid down my life before you did. It was your tireless help and provident care for so much that made it possible for me to persevere in the study of divine things. I don't say this because I pity you but because I feel at a loss. You, my brother, have found the One you love most of all. I am the one who needs consolation, not you. Our companionship was so enjoyable, our dispositions so alike, that I am wounded by our parting. Anger has swept over me, rage has fastened on me; I mourn, and you rejoice. We were so happy in each other's company, sharing so many experiences, talking together about them. Now you have passed on and traded all this for an immense reward! What a harvest of joys, what a profusion of blessings is yours. In place of me you have the abiding present of Christ. You mingle with the angelic choirs and our absence from one another brings no sense of loss. But who do I have to replace you?

What do you think of me as I sink beneath the weight of cares and deprived of the support you gave my weakness? You have plunged into the abyss of light, engulfed in endless happiness and are you still mindful of us who remain in the flesh? Will you be mindful of God's righteousness alone? Is one who is united to the Lord and one spirit with Him still able to delight in anything but God?

Yet God is love. The deeper one's union with God the more one is filled with love. God cannot endure pain but God is not without compassion for those who do. It is God's nature to show mercy and pardon. Thus you too must necessarily be merciful, clasped as you are to the one who is Mercy. Though you no longer feel the need of mercy, though you no longer suffer, you can still be compassionate. Your love hasn't been lessened but only changed. When you were clothed with God you didn't put off concern for us. God is certainly concerned about us. It is only all that smacks of weakness that you have cast aside, and not what pertains to love.

Love never comes to an end. So you will not forget me. That is how it must be. "Can a woman forget the child she has just born? Even if she did yet I will never forget you!" That's what the prophet Isaiah says in God's name. As long as I hope truly in God, and seek God first of all things, we cannot be parted. Pray my love for you may lead me even more deeply into God's love. Pray that my heart be always fixed in God and trust in him even more now that God has called you to Himself. In God and in God's love we forever have all that we can hope for.

KEEPING YOUR FOCUS ON THE RIGHT THING

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

What Scripture tells us about the Divine Trinity has little to do with the nature of the Godhead, which is and has always been a mystery, but has to do with God's relations with us and our relationship with God. The doctrine of the Trinity tells us about God's activity in our lives, as it is now and as it will be forever.

Take the God's self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush. Though much effort has been spent in trying to interpret the name God gives himself, what is actually important comes later when God describes himself as merciful and gracious and faithful to those he loves for a thousand generations; i.e., forever. These words reveal the face of God as it is turned to us. We can always count on God for mercy and generosity and fidelity. This is who God is and will always be for you and me. So what is worthwhile is a careful understanding of the Hebrew words God used in the self-description given to Moses.

The word for mercy is related to that for 'womb' and so seeks to make the intimacy and closeness of God to us! God is like a mother to us as much as a father, a parent who never ceases to care and work for our good and whose first concern is for us rather than for getting us to do or give something to God. Likewise the word here translated as 'gracious' can also be translated as "steadfast" love. God is tenacious about loving and giving to us and never gives up or, so to speak, gets to the "end of his rope". God always has a loving, healing, uplifting response to us; we can trust God no matter what happens, as Jesus did in the Garden and on the Cross. All this is vitally important.

God doesn't reward us but steadfastly loves and cares in faith-fullness and always will. God gives self without end! That's part of what it means to say that God has created us "immortal". The grace of the Lord Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are given and God never takes back a gift given. Our annual celebration of God's Triune character is not intended to help us understand God but to challenge us to accept who God is for us!

Theologians can speculate as much as they wish but we are called to imitate our God by giving ourselves in humble gratitude to the One who has given everything to us. It's a matter of entering into that gift, really letting it be our own and the very heart of who we are. We do this by leaning to be loving toward and for one another, as our God is toward and for us. We help one another accept who and what they are and then find ways to share their gifts with and for others. You know from experience how difficult that can be. Don't ever give up on others, because God never gives up on you.

THE MEANING OF THE SACRED HEART

A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Thomas Merton

We say St. Lutgard lived devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She teaches us such “devotion” means in a way that can give us a better understanding of Jesus’ love for each and all of us. Consider, for instance, how she died, beginning the day before the Feast of the Blessed Trinity and ending just after that of Christ’s Body and Blood.

Lutgard’s sisters realized she was dying on the evening before the Feast of the Trinity. She told them that a very dear friend would visit her on Monday and so they needn’t worry about losing her right away. She did begin to say goodbye to special friends, however. Finally, on the eve of Corpus Christi she asked her care giver to sit close to her so she could talk about all the blessed ones who had come from heaven to be with them in her last days on earth. The convent is packed, she said, with those who had gone before her, especially with sisters from the very convent in which she was dying. She smiled and was filled with joy at this thought, coming out of this state only to receive communion and the anointing of the sick.

To love Jesus, and to seek to live Jesus’ love, is to love one another. Lutgard was a mystic, given to silence and prayer and seeking to be with Jesus more than anyone else. Yet she was never alone when she was alone with Jesus. To be with Jesus is to be, in some mysterious way, with all those whom Jesus loves. To love Jesus is to love them with him. To love Jesus is to share the joy of being with all these people in common joy at God’s goodness and love for all creatures and especially the human ones. So Lutgard’s death was an experience of entering more fully into this love and into the joy and gladness of this “communion of the saints”.

It seems to have been a special joy for Lutgard to share this experience with others, especially those she lived with. In effect, her love for Jesus’ love (which is what devotion to the Sacred Heart is about) was simultaneously a joy in the many ways in which God had revealed his divine love through the diversity of her friends—of those many that God had given her the gift of knowing and loving in a special way. She shows us what it means to enter into Jesus’ own love and that we and she can’t do it apart from love for the community God has given us to live in. Community is love for one another. Jesus’ love always calls us to community and the mutual service which is sharing God’s love with one another.

THE WOMAN & OUR HOPES

A reflection inspired by texts of D.H. Lawrence & Nicolas Lash

The Book of Revelation is a meditation on the hope Christians are called to live by. So it is filled with symbols of real hope and of that which makes it unreal or diminishes it. Real hope is hope is for life in all possible abundance.

The primary symbols are The Woman and The Dragon. In the beginning God sent the Spirit to create life upon a void and empty earth. In the beginning of Christian life God sent the Spirit to a virgin to create the abundant life that is Jesus Christ. He opens a door to full-ness for every human person. The Woman symbolizes this gift of new and redeemed life raised from the wreckage we make by seeking to realize our hopes by our own power and knowledge. But we believed that we couldn't depend on God to bring us what we long for.

The symbol of this longing to create our own fulfillment is The Dragon. This is a very ancient symbol of forces that lie half-hidden within us and show themselves (e.g.) in sudden anger or desire for sex or food or whatever. It is what made Esau sell his birthright for a bowl of stew. Something within us can overpower the reason and love within us and keep us from using them rightly. "I want this and I want it right now!" That manifests a force demanding things when we least expect, like a serpent hidden in the grass that bites us.

The Woman—the Virgin Mary and the Church—offer us the life that is Jesus Christ, the fruit of God's Holy Spirit. The offer is one of guidance and of strength to master The Dragon. That is why the dragon wants to destroy the woman and her child and it is why God does not permit this. Our God is the God who creates hope where there seems to be none. That is why the Child was born of a virgin—a person who was all hope but without the help needed to make that hope real. Who made it real? Not another human being but God! Anyone who denies that God will fulfill the hope that lies deep in the human heart is wrong and leads others astray if they listen.

What is the Virgin's word to us? Trust in God and in God's Spirit. It will overshadow you and reduce the chaos of desires within you to an order that leads exactly where we want to go but haven't been able to go by ourselves. Trust in the Spirit is a primary message of Revelation. Look to Mary, and even to the Church, and you see how wonderfully your hopes are fulfilled. Will you trust in God and in God's Christ? Turn to The Woman, to Mary and to the Church, and learn how.