

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

THE ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sunday

THE BEGINNING AND THE END

A reflection by Fr. Karl Rahner

“Jesus said to his disciples: I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of Truth comes it will lead you to the complete truth.” When we first hear the mystery of the Trinity proclaimed our reaction is amazement. How wonderful that the Triune God should have surrendered himself so completely to us creatures as to reveal to us his most intimate and precious secret. But that is what God did. God did it out of a love the incarnate Christ calls friendship and theologians call benevolence.

Thomas Aquinas wrote: “Revealing our secrets to a friend is something that is so intimate that two hearts are as one; for whatever we reveal to our friend seems to stay in the depths of our own heart still”. The reason why our Lord told his disciples that he would no longer call them servants but friends is that he had shared his own heart with them. What this means is that we too are at the very heart of God in the Trinity; the secret that is the Trinity has been revealed to us, who are only creatures. St. Ignatius of Loyola says that God wanted to draw us into the depths of his heart.

God has drawn us into the community that is the divine nature because otherwise, we would never have been able to grasp and contain it within ourselves. The secret of God’s heart is too vast for us. Yet, mysteriously, the trinitarian mystery has been made the prototype and inmost foundation of our own sanctification. We can never fully understand our state of grace, nor God’s whole plan of salvation, without building on this trinitarian foundation. That is what the Church has done in the classical formula that is the Apostles’ Creed.

The creed is based on a trinitarian statement of belief. In its simplest shape, we can see it in an ancient Egyptian papyrus: *“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, and in God’s only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit, and in the resurrection of the body and in the Holy Catholic Church”*. The structure of the entire economy of salvation is presented here with wonderful clarity. Our Faith proceeds from the Father, who is God as the first beginning and blessed ending. The creed doesn’t begin with a profession of faith in the One God, for this was taken for granted, but with a profession of faith in this one God as the Father of an Only Son, who is our Lord and bore the earthly name of Jesus and is also the Christ anointed of the Spirit, who is equally the God of my faith.

The resurrection of the body will establish all this conclusively. We will rise again because through Christ the Holy Spirit has brought the divine life of the Spirit to earth. The Spirit has brought spiritual life to the community which, for that very reason, is called the Holy Church. The Church is to be the earthly reflection of what the Spirit is in God. The Church is our native country where we are safe. There our sanctification is accomplished through Christ until the glorious resurrection of our spiritualized being. The Church, then, is the mystic circle where the end joins the beginning. It leads us to our original source, the Father, who sent his Son to bring his children home. In the Church, we see the image of the Spirit who unites Father and Son, and us, in mutual love.

Monday

GOD GIVES AN APOSTOLATE TO ALL

A reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

The way we bear witness to God and to God's love revealed in Jesus depends on the way we cultivate the seeds of grace sown in us at our baptism and made fertile by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Everyone felt drawn, and even compelled, by the charm of Anthony's personality. He was perceived as a person who lived for Christ. It seemed a fulfillment of St. Paul's words: "*We are the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved*". The seeds of grace sown in Anthony bore abundant fruit. Ever faithful to the mark he received by this sacrament, he was transformed into the likeness of God. He was brought "*from one degree of glory to the next, and all of this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*".

For all of us, fidelity and openness to transformation are essential duties. We are called to live according to the hope given us by the promises made when we were baptized. If we were infants, we didn't know what we were being helped to do but we grew to realize that fidelity to divine grace was being asked of us. It is a grace given so that all may be drawn to Christ. He is the source of life, of purification from all that destroys people, and of perfection in all our human and divine gifts.

Everyone has a personal calling. Everyone should act in accordance with the promptings that flow from this grace. All are called to bear witness to the Divine Founder of the Christian faith and to do it in a way that draws others. This is essential to God's life in us human beings. It is the only good path to the great expectations we are taught to place in the life of Heaven. We must have hope. We learn to hope from the hopes of others.

Anthony's mission was preaching. But his preaching was so effective because he mirrored Christ in his living. That he did this in a way that pleased God is witnessed by the extraordinary manifestations of divine power which occurred throughout his life. These were not intended to call us to becoming God's instruments in such a way but to remind us that only a visible presence of grace draws people to Jesus and to God.

All of us are called to share in the work of the Kingdom of Heaven. That is in itself a great privilege and joy. It is a miracle that takes the form of a human life radiating the love of God for all. This is what the Lord, and the Church which is Christ's Body, expect of all those who believe. It is entrusted to you. You are being reminded of this on the feast day of St. Anthony.

Everyone is always able to carry on what is called the apostolate of good example. Our world is filled with bad examples, and with persons who are not at all ashamed to give bad example. The world needs good examples! It needs very good ones! It needs them from all who profess the Christian faith. What a transformation there would be if all two billion Christians gave such an example. Do it without fear and graciously. Seek to spread around you the warmth of your convictions and the serenity of your faith. Then you will be an apostle of Christ's love for our world and the seed of its transformation in Christ.

Tuesday

IMITATING CHRIST IN LOVE & MERCY

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Cyprian of Carthage

What Christ did and taught is God's will. That means practicing humility in behavior, steadfastness in faith, modesty in words, justice in deeds, mercy in good works, and discipline in daily life. This means we are to become incapable of doing injury to another but capable of bearing injuries. It means rejoicing in the prosperity of a neighbor as though it were our own, thinking of another's loss as our own, and believing another's gain is our own. It is to love even friends for God's sake and not simply for their own. It means putting up with enemies, and even loving them. We are to do nothing to another that we would not want to befall us and not to refuse to another anything that you could rightly want to have given to you.

Are we ready to help a neighbor in time of trouble and not only according to our means but even beyond our means? Do we keep peace with our brothers and sisters? To do such things is to love God and to do them wholeheartedly is to love God with all our heart. We love God as our Heavenly Father and we fear him as our Lord. We put nothing before Christ, because he has never put anything before us. Yes, all who love the name of the Lord will be glorified. We can accept being unhappy now, confident that we will be happy hereafter.

We will only be following the Lord Jesus if we behave in this way. Those who say they believe in Christ must live in the same way he did. The Son of God didn't come to reign but to serve. He became poor to make us rich; he accepted blows for our sake; he showed us how to feel no loss when we are scourged. It is a matter of imitating Christ. That is what a Christian is. A Christian is holy, innocent, undefiled and chaste. There is no place in the heart of a Christian for malice, but only for devotion and goodness.

A Christian is one who imitates the lifestyle of Christ. Christians are merciful to all and ignorant of injustice. Christians forbid that the poor be disparaged and help the unfortunate. Christians mourn with those who mourn, feel the pain of others as though it were their own, and are moved to tears by the tears of others. All are welcome at a Christian's table. Everyone knows Christians are genuinely good.

Are you, then, a Christian? Then you are seeking to serve God diligently day and night. Your soul is sincere and without stain. Your conscience is faithful and pure. Your mind is wholly focused on God. You devalue worldly possession precisely so you may acquire heavenly ones. If you are this kind of person then you know joy and peace of heart. God would give you every gift. Open your life to God and to God's gifts.

Wednesday

THE TASK OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

A reflection developed from On the Triple Way & On Perfection

Negligence in making spiritual progress can be understood only as negligence in using the means and opportunities God provides. It can arise from weariness and discouragement due to repeated failures, to a distorted idea of perfection, or to a disregard for practices that lead one to perfection.

In considering discouragement, one must distinguish between a careless and fervent pursuit of closer union with God. It is easy to be discouraged when we realize how far short of our ideal we are and how painful progress is. But there is a healthy dissatisfaction with self and we can use it to motivate ourselves to greater efforts. We must let ourselves be motivated primarily by love for God. Do we want perfection for ourselves or simply because God wants it?

This is connected with erroneous ideas of Christian perfection. One must not think of it as a matter only of what one does. That is pharisaic externalism. Nor is it a matter of multiplying formal prayers, practicing more mortification, or cultivating external mannerisms. Ask yourself: With what do I equate to perfection? Is it a matter of special spiritual experiences or of seeking “religious” prestige and so authority? Do I seek “sweetness” in prayer rather than the God of all sweetness? Am I discontented by spiritual dryness? It is easy to seek human benefits from our supposedly spiritual strivings, but perfection is a matter of loving God and not of gaining benefits from efforts to be close to God.

If humility is the foundation of our spiritual life then we will use every opportunity to practice it. Do you seek to avoid humiliation? How can one be humble without accepting it gladly? Further, as long as charity remains a purely human matter of living without conflict, or in an atmosphere of mutual respect and praise, one has not gone beyond the merely human. I need the mercy of God and this motivates me to be kind, gentle, understanding, and merciful to others. One has to be ready to make sacrifices, even for those whom one doesn't like.

In order to make progress, we must know ourselves as thoroughly as possible. Do I seek to discover not only my faults but the motives behind them? It is often more important to know why we fall than to know we have. Let's never allow ourselves to fall into “spiritual senility” but keep ourselves spiritually alive and youthful. St. Francis said, “Brethren, let's begin now, for up to now we are as though we had done nothing”.

Thursday

DEEPING OUR PRAYER

A reflection by Thomas Keating, OCSO

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do. They think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like this. Your Father knows what you need before you ask. Pray in this way: Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial but rescue us from the evil one.” (Mt. 6:7ff)

Prayer is a large umbrella. There are many kinds of prayer and many ways of expressing it. Fundamentally, it is a response to God’s invitation to turn our minds and hearts to him.

The classical formulas are that of Evagrius—which is the laying aside of thoughts, and that of St. John Damascene—which is conversation of the mind with God. By “mind” St. John means the spiritual faculties of intellect and will.

Sometimes this interior movement needs to be expressed in words or concepts, but to be true prayer it does not have to be expressed in these ways. The Fathers of the Church and the great spiritual masters of the Christian tradition have elaborated on various levels and degrees of prayer. We may also think of prayer as a conversation with God that deepens as one becomes more and more devoted to Him.

That deepening doesn’t prevent us from expressing prayer spontaneously, on every level of our being—from the spoken word of prayer to the simple movement of the will. This last is what the Cloud of Unknowing calls a “gentle stirring of love”. This simple movement of the will is scarcely perceptible to our attention, but at the deepest level of our being, it unites us more intimately to the Holy Spirit than any other form of prayer. As St. John of the Cross teaches, the Spirit is the sole mover at that deep level of interior silence and works powerfully without our being aware of what is happening.

O Holy Spirit, let your light open my mind to the truth and strengthen my will to accept that truth without wavering. Never let me cease to strive to pray and draw closer to you. For those who keep knocking, open the door to deeper love.

Friday

DO EVERYTHING FOR JESUS

A reflection from "The Saint of the Month" Website

Blessed Mary-Joseph died at the age of 25 of tuberculosis. His constant trial in life had been difficulty in learning and retaining what he learned. It had prevented his being accepted into the seminary and led his pastor to recommend him to the Trappist abbey of St. Mary of the Desert. He entered the novitiate in 1894 at the age of 16. His formation director told him simply: "Only trust, and I will help you love Jesus!" He kept this in his heart and it led him to the motto: "All for Jesus through Mary!"

He was known in his community for a perpetual smile and a readiness to help. He was always ready to learn—if only he could remember. The learning difficulty often led to misunderstandings and this led to humiliation. This was difficult for him to accept but he trusted, as his formation director had asked, and found he was able to use such experiences to deepen his love for Jesus. His favorite practice was the meditation on the passion of Christ. In this way, he surrendered all that he was, which meant both the strengths and the weaknesses, to Christ. He trusted that God would provide whatever he was lacking.

Brother Mary-Joseph made his solemn profession on the Feast of the Ascension in 1900. He turned to Mary for the help he would need in his studies for the priesthood. He had the same learning difficulties as before but persevered. He was ordained after only two years, in 1902. He had been feeling unwell for some time already and shortly after ordination he was diagnosed with advanced tuberculosis. It surprised all that he hadn't complained about the increasing pain this disease had to have been causing him. As with his learning disabilities, he bore the pain without complaint offering it to Jesus.

He was acquainted with a group that sponsored the dedication of those with incurable illnesses as who were called "victim souls". Brother Mary-Joseph practiced this devotion and was helped by it to bear the increasingly severe pain that the advance of his tuberculosis was causing. Since the community knew of no ordinary way in which the disease might be mitigated his abbot sent him home for some weeks. His parents were orchard keepers and their family led a very outdoor life. This didn't prove to be any help to Mary-Joseph and he only grew worse. His family sent him back to the monastery where he found strength in his self-offering as a victim for the Church and through the celebration of Mass.

On the morning of June 17, 1903, Mary-Joseph passed to God. He was only 25 years old but had borne his cross bravely and with a minimum of complaint. He already had a reputation for holiness and this gradually spread. In 1935 the process for his beatification was begun and he was beatified in 2004. In imitation of him, may we find strength in the knowledge that God loves us and is ever with us. What we can't do by ourselves the Lord will give us strength to do, if only we do it with Jesus and for Jesus.

Saturday

HOW MARY TEACHES MERCY & COMPASSION

A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard

Mary, is there anyone who had no good things to say in your praise? Is there anyone, rather, who hasn't asked you for help and received it? If anyone doesn't want to praise you that person should remember that you never fail to show mercy and compassion to those who need them. What's more, we know ourselves to be no more than your servants and helpers and we congratulate ourselves because we have learned humility and compassion and the virginal gift of self completely to God by imitating you.

What we love and admire most is your mercy. After all, it is to this mercy that we owe the restoration of the whole world and the salvation of all of us. Clearly, you cared very much for us all when you listened to the angel: "Don't be afraid, Mary, because you have found grace with God." Who can take in the complete breadth and length and height of God's mercy, and from God, you received that mercy to share with us? It stretches even to the Last Day for all who ask it. How could anyone be more blessed than one who has received such grace?

Mercy and compassion are as broad as the universe and certainly embrace the whole earth. They reach the city of God. Are the ruins of that city being restored? And you have been the means of repairing them by your consent to God's design. We were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death and now we have obtained redemption. It is through your assent that hell has been emptied, that the breaches in the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem have been repaired.

The life that had been lost has been restored to miserable but hopeful mortals. God is all-powerful and through your acceptance of his will and plan, you have been the channel of his all-powerful mercy and compassion. In fact, your charity has been all-powerful because it is God's charity poured out through you. It has shown itself not only in deeds of mercy but in endless compassion. God has made you equally rich in both these marvelous qualities.

O brothers and sisters of mine, let's run with all our might to the fountain of mercy opened for us through Mary. We are so often wretched and miserable. So, our misery has recourse to the treasure of compassion and kindness which God has opened through you! Help us, mother, to learn from you and open ourselves to the endless riches that are God's graces and blessings.