

Trinity Sunday 2020 “Divine Love for a Stiff Necked People”

Fr. Frank Schuster

Words cannot express how wonderful it is to worship with you in person again. The health department wants me to keep my homily brief so let me just begin with how grateful I am for everyone’s help today to make all this happen. A special word of thanks as well to our staff here at St. Teresa of Calcutta who put up with me and our amazing parishioners who volunteered to make this mass a reality.

We have not been able to worship together publically for about 90 days. Just think about that for one moment, 90 days. Tears come to my eye just thinking about that. I don’t know how many of you know this, but about 90 days ago, when we received word that public gatherings were to be canceled, one of the first things I did was turn off that bell tower. The reason why I did that is because it was simply too depressing to have the bell tower ring at a mass time with no one here. And so, my thinking was, that bell tower should not ring again until we can gather again. Let me tell you, hearing that bell ring fills my heart with such joy. It is fitting that, after what feels like an exile these past three months, we hear that bell ringing on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. As we open our parish again, it just simply feels right to do so in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. With those words we recognize God as three distinct persons and yet indivisibly one. We also recognize that everything we do begins and ends with a relationship with our Triune God.

I spent a lot of time reflecting and praying about this doctrine this week wondering how best to apply what we believe about God to the issues that concern us today. I confess I also thought to myself, how do preach a homily like that quickly enough so that the health department doesn’t shut us down? We live in very difficult times. If the pandemic wasn’t enough, our country is being torn apart by a lot of anger right now. We have people in our country who have been unjustly given cause to be afraid for their safety because of the color of their skin. That is wrong. We have shop owners and home owners afraid of having their property destroyed. That is also wrong. We have really bad people out there who are stifling the voices of good people. And, I am not just talking about the protestors who are law abiding, whose voices are being hijacked by miscreants. We also have a lot of police officers out there who are being maligned and stereotyped because the egregious crimes of a few. Let me tell you, as a Catholic priest, I can tell you how hurtful that is. It’s hurtful. I’d rather we just say “thank you” to our police officers who are professionally doing their job to keep us safe.

My friends, in our first reading from Exodus, Moses is exasperated by the chaos and rioting of the Hebrews he led out of Egypt. And boy, does this reading come at an interesting time. Moses is angry and frustrated with his community, but nevertheless he finds himself trying to intercede for them before God. Moses prays to God, “This is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins, and receive us as your own.” I can’t speak for others, but this has been my prayer lately, “God, we are a stiff-necked people. Pardon our wickedness and sins and receive us as your own”.

How does God answer this prayer, you might ask? God's answer is summarized beautifully in our Gospel reading this weekend, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." God teaches us what love looks like. In fact, St. Augustine once mused that God the Father could be rightly called the "lover" and God the Son could be rightly called the "beloved" and God the Holy Spirit can be rightly called the "love" that processes forth from the Father and the Son. We can see all three of these moments as separate, "lover", "beloved", and "love" and yet nevertheless truly one. Another way of saying this, as Bishop Barron likes to paraphrase St. Augustine, God the Father forgets himself out of love for the Son, the Son of God forgets himself out of love for the Father, and the Holy Spirit forgets himself out of love for the Father and the Son. We can all perceive these three moments as clearly distinct and yet also one as well. It is all just an analogy of course, but a very good one.

Meanwhile, Genesis says we are made in the image and likeness of this Triune God. As we all know, the power of sin has distorted that image and likeness we are called to, which we have seen on full display in the news each day. How do we as a people return to our vocation of being in God's image and likeness? We clearly can't do it by ourselves. We need a redeemer. God answers that prayer with his Son Jesus who taught us how to love by example. As Jesus has loved us, we are called to love others regardless of how difficult that is, because living in the inner life God is to live in an eternal procession of lover, beloved and love.

On the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity, we marvel and wonder at how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be three and yet indivisibly one. Maybe this doctrine of the Holy Trinity is exactly what we really need right now as a human race. Just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be three and yet indivisibly one, perhaps it is time for the many diverse people of our country and world to start seeing each other as "one" as well. What would that look like? It looks like a disciples who pray for each other, even when we are surrounded by a stiff-necked people. It looks like stubbornly loving each other as well, even when this requires us to embrace a cross. The world will not find unity or find peace until we return to that image and likeness of God, which includes learning how to forget ourselves out of love for others. What could that look like at home? What could that look like at work? What could that look like in our community? What could that look like in the coming week, if we all really worked at it?

And so, my friends, thanks be to God that our bell tower is ringing again. Thanks to be God we are able to worship together again. We are challenged now to be transformed by the worship we offer and conform ourselves to Christ so to leave today as ambassadors of almighty God to a world so desperately hungry for his love.