

## **THE MOST HOLY TRINITY**

*Gospel: John 3:16-18*

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

### **REFLECTION 1: IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

The story is told of a little boy whose big brother needed a blood transfusion but had a very rare blood type that only his little brother shared. The father asked the boy if he would be willing to give his blood to save his big brother's life. He agreed. When the transfusion began, the little brother asked his father, 'How long will it take for me to die?'

On the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, Father God asks his Son to be the sacrificial lamb that will open the door to eternal life for all who believe. The mystery of Christianity is contained in this one line from the Gospel of John; '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' (John 3:16). I would like us to focus on the readings set out for today. These readings from Exodus, Paul and John focus on the concrete relationships God initiates and sustains with humanity. As we read from the selection from Exodus, we see Moses, the recording secretary of the Ten Commandments, anticipate a close encounter with God. This comes after his people fashioned a golden calf in an attempt to create a god they could understand and control. We may well guess that Moses prepared himself to venerate the awesome Lawgiver in fear and trembling. But we learn that he was met with the Great Lover. While the people identified God with terrifying sounds, clouds, smoke, fire and earthquakes, God's own definition of divinity expressed the tender personal qualities of patience, forgiveness and fidelity. This is the God whose Law actually 'refreshes the soul' (Ps 119:8); the God who draws wandering humanity away from sin and evil with 'bands of love' (Hosea) – not entirely a fearsome tyrant, but a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness' (Ex.).

Our reading from St. Paul is a wonderful expression of the Trinity that deepens the community's life in God. Paul invites the Corinthians to rejoice, assuring them that strengthening their commitment to each other; they also deepen their bonds with God. 'The grace of our Lord', their unearned gift from God, 'the love of God' – their experience of God in their community, then, 'the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' the one who comforts and intercedes on their behalf. If they refuse to recognize God in their community, then they do not know the God of Jesus. Finally in the Gospel, we hear the end of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus – a conversation that has inspired one of the most often quoted, John 3:16, as we are reminded of that prominent placard displayed in Croke Park, 'God so loved the world'. The way to know the Trinity is by pondering on God's love for our world, made visible for us in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus proclaims that salvation – eternal life – comes from belief in God's Son – a new birth as it were by being open to God's transforming love. Trinity Sunday celebrates God's ongoing, ever faithful, creative love for us, ever vibrant through the Spirit's presence in and among us. Don't worry; it's beyond our comprehension. In the end, it is the mystery itself that will grasp and keep us.

### **REFLECTION 2: CELEBRATING THE LOVE OF GOD**

A story is told about St. Augustine. One day he was walking along the beach contemplating the mystery of the Trinity. He came upon a boy who was digging a hole in the sand. The boy was pouring water from the sea into the hole. When Augustine asked him what he was doing, the lad explained, 'I'm going to pour the

ocean into this hole'. 'That's impossible', the saint remarked, 'the whole ocean will not fit in the hole you have made'. The boy replied, 'And you cannot fit the Trinity into your tiny brain!' The legend then says that the boy vanished, leaving St Augustine to wonder if he had been talking to an angel.

Our puny minds cannot grasp the immensity of the mystery of the Trinity, how there can be three persons in one God. That this is true we take it on God's word as an act of faith and an act of love. In fact, no greater love has ever been told than the one that Jesus shared with Nicodemus 'God so loved the world that he gave his only son' (John 3: 16-18). Scholars have called this declaration of love a 'gospel in miniature' because it speaks in only a few words of immeasurable dimensions of God's saving love.

Oscar Romero, the martyred archbishop of San Salvador (d. 1980), suggested that if this short text represents the Gospel, then Christ is the voice who keeps on explaining to us that God is love, that God is power, and that the spirit of God is upon Jesus and he is the divine Word – God's presence among us. Today's Gospel also affirms that God's motivation for desiring to be engaged with humankind is love, inexplicable, immeasurable, unmerited. This same quality of love is characteristic of all God's overtures to us. For instance, when God chose Israel to be integral to the divine plan, the reason the author of Deuteronomy explained was love: 'If God set his heart on you and chose you, it was not because you were greater than any other nation; you were the least of all peoples! It was for love of you' (Deut. 7: 7-8). It was this love that became flesh in Jesus and dwelt among us. Mentioned no less than 37 times in St. John's writings, this love offers believers a daily reason for celebration.

We cannot remain unresponsive – faith is the only appropriate answer – a lived faith that translates itself into a decision to love God and to love others as an expression of our love of God. God gave his Son, his only Son – this word 'gave' reminds us of Abraham who gave his Son Isaac back to God, so also did God give Jesus for the sake of the world, 'giving up his spirit' (V. 16).