

A HOMILY ON THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST BLESSED TRINITY BY FATHER FRANCIS

Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Revelation 1:8): What Manner of God is our God?

Today is the solemnity of the Blessed Trinity. It comes after Pentecost Sunday. This is the first solemnity in Ordinary Time. Other solemnities which follow are Corpus Christi and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Why is the Feast of the Blessed Trinity presented right after Pentecost Sunday which is the climax of the Paschal Mystery?. Why do we celebrate it and what are we invited to learn from it?

The Church is a wise mother and teacher (*Mater et Magistra*). She presents this Feast only after we have celebrated the suffering, death, resurrection, Ascension [of the Lord], and Pentecost in order to teach the innermost mystery of God. The protagonist in the great events of the Paschal Mystery are Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Christ Jesus constantly speaks of the Father: "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). "If you love me, you will keep my commandments and I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit, another Advocate to be with you" (John 14:15).

The question is who is this Father who sends the Son and from whom the Son sends the Holy Spirit. To answer this

our holy Mother the Church presents the Solemnity of the Blessed Trinity so that we may know the inner nature of God and fall in love with him who loved us first. Desiring that we may glimpse his inmost being and feel at home with him, God reveals himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The unveiling of God's inner life is evident in the sacred Tradition, the Scriptures and in nature. God's revelation in the sacred Tradition shows that he disclosed himself to our ancestors and prophets before the Bible was written. He spoke to Adam, to Noah, sons of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses etc. God speaks to each one of us in the depth of our consciences.

What do we know about this God? From what we hear, see, and touch, from the beauty and order of the seasons and nature, it stands to reason that God who made all these is benevolent, omnipotent and omniscient (all knowing). Looking at it with the eyes of faith, the revelation of God both in his Written and Unwritten Words teaches that God is love (1 John 4:7-21). Expressing this truth the antiphon 2 in the Office of the reading on the solemnity of the Blessed Trinity says, "The Father is Love, the Son is grace, the Holy Spirit is the bond of fellowship; O blessed Trinity." God's love excludes no one. The Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all men without exception: There is not, never has been, and never

will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer" (CCC, 605)¹.

May we now look at the scriptural texts before us today (Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9, Daniel 3:52, 53, 54,55, 2 Cor 13:11-13, John 3:16-18): These four passages from the Bible all reveal something about the love of God. Beginning from the first reading, we read, "The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity" (Exodus 34:6). This declaration was from God revealing himself once again to Moses after the incident of the Golden calf. Moses had pleaded with God to forgive the sins of his people and asked God to show him his face (glory). Had God being anything other than love and mercy, he would have wiped out the stiff-necked people of Moses' generation. The peoples' repeated sins and rebellions merited extermination. But they were spared thanks to "God's love, which continues for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin; yet not declaring the guilty guiltless" (Exodus 34: 7).The merciful love of God is also expressed in the responsorial Psalm (Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55). The Lord rescued the three young men, Daniel Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego who were thrown into the fire because they exercised their freedom of worship. These three young men had refused to worship idols and were being unjustly punished by king

¹ Council of Quiercy (853): DS 624; cf. 2 Cor 5:15; 1 Jn 2:2).

Nebuchadnezzar But God, who heeds the cries of the poor, intervened and saved them from the fiery furnace. In the heart of the fire they extolled the love of God singing: "Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever; And blessed is your holy and glorious name, praiseworthy and exalted above all for all ages" (Daniel 3:52).

Corroborating this point about the nature of God, the second reading (2 Cor13:11-13) describes the Supreme Deity as a God of love and peace who comes to those who are open to welcome him. The message of utter tenderness and counsel contained in that passage can only be inspired by God who himself is love.

The climax in God's revelation, as love, is the sacrifice of God's son for our sake and the sake of our redemption. "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). God who puts himself into the hand of those he created is the God whose primary attitude is love. God's love stops at nothing in the redemption of man.

HOW DO WE KNOW THERE ARE THREE PERSONS IN ONE GOD?

With unaided human reason, it is possible to know that God is one but impossible to know the Trinity of Persons in God

without REVELATION. "The Trinity is a mystery of faith in the strict sense, one of the "mysteries that are hidden in God, which can never be known unless they are revealed by God."² "To be sure, God left traces of his Trinitarian being in his work of creation and in his Revelation throughout the Old Testament. But his inmost Being as Holy Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to reason alone or even to Israel's faith before the Incarnation of God's Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 237). In the very beginning of creation, God revealed his inmost nature. The Bible says, "The earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters" (Genesis 1:1). The mighty wind, in Hebrew, translates as *ruah Elohim* - Spirit or Breath of God. Another hint to the Trinity of persons in God is that during the creation of man God used the plural pronoun, "us" God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Looking at this in the light of the New Testament we see who are meant in the "We" of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). That means that there is God who spoke who created, there is Word spoken and the breath or the Spirit of God. The God who is "the source and origin of all divinity"³ and who spoke is the Father, the Word who became flesh is the Son and the Breath of God is the Holy Spirit. The three Persons

² *Dei Filius* 4:DS 3015

³ Nicene Creed, DS 150

were clearly revealed at the baptism of Jesus. After Jesus was baptized, “The heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mtt 5:17).

Holy Spirit reveals Jesus and Jesus reveals the Father. Completing his mission in the world, the Incarnate Son revealed the Trinity of persons in one God when he says, I am going to the Father and I will send you the Holy Spirit (John 16:7, 14:26). The events of Ascension and Pentecost are benchmarks in revelation of the Trinity.

The Trinity of persons is also revealed in the Epistles, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens” (Ephesians 1:3). And in our second reading today we have the Trinitarian blessing: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Cor.13:14, cf. *1 Cor* 12:4-6; *Eph* 4:4-6.). “Christians are baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). “The faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity” (CCC 232)⁴.

⁴ St. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 9, *Exp. symb.*:CCL 103,47.

The Lateran Council clearly defined the dogma of the Most Holy Trinity saying , "We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the "consubstantial Trinity."⁵ The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire: "The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which the Holy Spirit is, i.e. by nature one God."⁶ In the words of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), "Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature."⁷

RESPONDING TO GOD WHO LOVES US

The Lord Jesus through whom we come to know the Father and the Holy Spirit makes this clear. Our relationship with God does not rest only on words or lip service. It demands our whole selves and a harmony of words and actions. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). As they say today, we must walk the talk. Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere "command"; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us. Integrating Shema (Deuteronomy

⁵ Council of Constantinople II (553): DS 421

⁶ Council of Toledo XI (675): DS 530:26.

⁷ Lateran Council IV (1215): DS 804.

6:4-6) and the ordinance in Leviticus 19:18, our Lord says, "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-32). This makes for a complete vision of life. Loving God and neighbor makes us happy and healthy because that is how we are made. Our hearts are made to love God and to love our neighbors. On this St Paul writes, "Finally, brothers, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss" (2 Cor 13:11-12). In our context today, mending one's ways mean choosing not to cut off from your life someone who offended you, but opening your heart to reconciliation even if it will give room for being offended again. It also means not letting racism or selfishness take possession of our hearts that we kill another person be it an unborn child or a forty six years old man. Living the mystery of the Blessed Trinity means remembering that we are children of one Father, brothers and sisters in one Lord and letting this guide our relationship with one another.