

Homily on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity and Father's Day
June 15th, 2014

By Deacon Mick Irving

Today we celebrate one of the central mysteries of our Christian faith—the Most Blessed Trinity. In the early Church, and even today, great saints and philosophers have racked their brains trying to explain the Trinity.

There is a story that St. Augustine was walking on the beach contemplating the mystery of the Trinity. He was immersed in thought about the Trinity and wanted so much to understand the concept of one God in three persons and to be able to explain it logically. Then he saw a boy who had dug a hole in the sand. The boy kept walking out to the sea again and again with a small cup and bringing some water back to pour into the hole. St. Augustine asked him, “What are you doing?” “I’m going to empty the ocean into this hole.” And Augustine replied: “How do you think that you can empty this immense sea into this tiny hole and with this tiny cup?” The boy answered back, “And you, how do you suppose that with your small head you can comprehend the Trinity?” The boy then vanished and the story concludes that St. Augustine had been talking to an angel.

So, the dogma of the Trinity is NOT one of those mysteries that we can be confident we will come to understand in this life, but it is important to have a basic understanding of the dogma.

What is the dogma of the Trinity? Simply put, it is that there are three persons in one God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Now, if I were to attempt to explain, in this homily, the related theological terms of essence or substance or nature, and the terms hypostasis or persons, and show how they relate to each other, and then if I ask you if are following me, I suspect you would charitably reply, that “yes, you are following me, but if you knew the way home you’d turn around now!” So, like Augustine we may not be able to understand the HOW of the Trinity but I think it is very important to understand the WHY.

Why did God reveal to us this mystery of His inner life? The importance of this dogma lies in this: we are made in the image of God. The unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, constitutes a family; it is a communion of persons, it constitutes a sincere gift of each person to the other. Christ's revelation of the inner life of God illumines who we are as persons, since we are made in His image. It also illumines how we should relate to others and how society should function and exist in relation to God.

Therefore, since we are made in God's image and likeness, we can only reach our fullest potential by imitating the Trinity. One concrete way we do that in the natural order is in marriage where each spouse gives sincerely to the other.

The Nicene Creed affirms: the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." The Holy Spirit is often understood as the Spirit of Love who proceeds from the infinite ocean of love between Father and Son.

This aspect of Love *giving life* to more Love is what occurs in marriage when children are conceived. The husband and wife, in an act of complete self-giving,

produce, as a result of their own love for one another, a new life: a child whose eyes reflect the Most Holy Trinity.

True love takes the form of a family. When a husband and wife are in love, they seal their loving by producing a baby, they become a family--father, mother and child -- love when it is perfected becomes a trinity-with a small "t".

In contrast, our modern society would say that it is "prudent" to first "try out" one's intended spouse before committing to marriage, thus it is assumed that couples will live together for a time. There is a long list of faulty "reasons" cited, which range from "checking compatibility" to "insuring there won't be any surprises" when and if a couple should decide to get married in the future. Yet in such an incomplete relationship there is no true and sincere gift of self; on the contrary, it is a forgery of a true gift, and often a selfish position in which one person uses another for his or her own advantage.

These couples are not modeling their relationship on the **inseparable unity** of the Most Holy Trinity. As Pope Saint John Paul the Great has said, these errors regarding the relationship between couples degrades our fundamental values, creates a mistaken perception that spouses are really independent of each other, causes confusion regarding the authority between parents and children, increases the number of divorces; drives the ever more frequent recourse to sterilization, and ultimately to abortion—as the saint says—it reinforces a truly contraceptive mentality."

Obviously, this is not in keeping with the example of the truly life-giving relationship of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, we should all strive to recognize that we are made in God's (The Trinity's) image and likeness and we should act accordingly. And, when we fail, thank God that He has given us the great sacrament of confession, where we admit our guilt, confess our sins, and do penance so that we remain right with God.

Since it is Father's Day, it is appropriate to say a few words about you who are fathers. I recently read an article regarding the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. The article cited studies from the Swiss government, the Baptist Press, and interestingly, MSNBC. It talked about the overwhelming influence a Father has in the upbringing of his children. The article discussed that, with the father's positive influence, there were much higher percentages of children keeping their faith, attending Church after departing the home, becoming Christian if the father became Christian, and avoiding addictions and illicit sexual relations. I found the article very uplifting, so I read the responses to the article. Unfortunately, there were a number of responses that were negative, vitriolic, and unloving. I took the latter to mean that some people did not have those positive experiences with their fathers and were angry about it. In such cases I would suggest that these children turn to God, our perfect Father, for direction, consolation and love. At any rate, I came across one response that I thought you fathers (and you mothers and young people) should contemplate. This woman writes:

I thought my Dad was the most controlling man in the world when I was growing up. He always had an eye on my three sisters and me, rarely ever let us go anywhere with boys and even literally took the first guy I brought home onto the back porch to talk

to him before he'd let him take me out...TO DINNER. He disciplined us for things we did that "all the other kids' parents were letting them do," and made us budget the money we made as soon as we were old enough to count change, only allowing us to spend 50% of it on fun things. We weren't allowed to win prizes at our own birthday parties, couldn't watch certain movies, and always had to be in for curfew several hours before all our friends. For years I was so frustrated with who he was and how he treated us as his daughters.

But then he walked me down the aisle two years ago as a 20-year-old bride. It was that day, after seeing the look in his eye when he kissed my cheek goodbye, that I realized all that "control" was actually protection and love.

If it wasn't for my father's structure, I wouldn't know discipline. If it wasn't for his heart, I wouldn't know the Lord. If it wasn't for his love, I wouldn't know I was too valuable to give myself away to anyone but the man I married. If it wasn't for his affection, I wouldn't know I was beautiful. If it wasn't for his influence, I wouldn't have chosen a man so much like him- strong, honorable, honest, hard-working, and brave- to spend my life with. If it wasn't for my father, I have no idea where or who I'd be. So, fathers, know your dignity.

Now from the viewpoint of a son.

A young boy had just gotten his driving permit. He asked his father if they could discuss the use of the car. His father took him to his study and said to him, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your Bible a little and get your hair cut and we'll talk about it." After about a month, the boy came back and again asked his father if they could discuss use of the car. They again went to the father's study where his father said, "Son, I've been real proud of you. You have brought your grades up and you've studied your Bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut."

The young man waited a moment and replied, "You know Dad, I've been thinking about that. You know, Samsom had long hair, Moses had long hair, Noah had long hair, and even Jesus had long hair!", to which is father replied, "Yes, you're right, and they also WALKED everywhere they went!"

I will close with a poem from a young man to his father, a father who obviously tried to model himself in the Trinity's image.

*A son rarely tells his father how he really feels,
A handshake or a pat on the back is all that he reveals,
I'd like to right that wrong,
Here in this little song.
Thank you for shaping my life,
Thank you for teaching me all you can,
You are no ordinary man,
You make me everything I am.
Thank you for taking the time,
Thank you for showing me the way,
And thank you for being there when I need you,
Thank you for every single day.*

*Now I've been blessed with a son of my own,
Got my own bedtime stories to tell,
If I can raise him half as well as you raised me,
Guess I'll be doing pretty well.
Thank you for your guiding hand,
Thank you for making my dreams come true,
You're an extraordinary man,
And I hope you're as proud of me
As I am proud of you.
Thank you for giving me life,
Thank you for showing me good from bad
I guess I'm only really trying to say,
Thank you for being my Dad.
Even though the years drift away, I
never took the time just to say,
I love you, and I always have,
And thank you for being my Dad.
Thank you for being my Dad.*

Fathers, know your dignity, for in your family you represent God the Father, the first person in the Most Holy Trinity.