

## Homily on Matthew 28:16-20; May 30 & 31, 2015 The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

“All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Just last month I heard a talk on this Gospel passage. We were up in Denver at a Conference called “The Amazing Parish Conference”. One of the speakers there was Curtis Martin. He is the founder of FOCUS, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students. What Curtis Martin said about this passage was that this is the most authoritative statement ever made in the history of the world. He acknowledges that you can argue that since Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God, everything He said is authoritative. However, when Jesus says, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me”, you have to admit there is something special behind those words.

This passage, known as the “Great Commission”, contains the last words Jesus speaks to the Apostles before He ascends into Heaven, so they are pretty important. What does Jesus tell them? He tells them to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, to teach them all He has commanded, and that He would be with them always. There is much that can be said about these final words of our Lord, but what I want to point out to you today, is that within this very authoritative statement, we see the Doctrine of the Trinity revealed to us. Jesus says to, “Baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”; there it is, three persons one God, the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, a day the Church sets aside, in a very special way, for us to ponder that great question, “Who is God?” The belief in a Trinitarian God is the distinguishing belief of Christianity. It distinguishes us from those who don’t believe in God at all, Atheists; from those who don’t believe in a personal God, Deists and New Agers; and even from those who agree that there is only one God, Muslims and Jews, but who don’t believe in the Trinity. Where do we get this Trinitarian belief from? Well, just like pretty much everything else in the Christian Faith, we get our belief, in who God is, from Jesus Christ. This is important, because often

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when we are talking about this great “Mystery” of the Trinity, we struggle, because it is so hard to explain, and we tend to fall back and say, well it is a “mystery”, just accept it –. That’s really not a good enough answer. We need to understand, that in the words of Frank Sheed, “A mystery, in this sense, is not something we can’t know anything about, it is just something we can’t know everything about.” We know what we know about the Trinity, because Jesus Christ revealed it to us.

How does Jesus Christ reveal the Trinity to us? In a particular way, the purpose of the Gospel is to compel an answer from each of us to the question Jesus asked his disciples at Cesarea Phillipi – “Who do you say that I am?” This question leaps off the pages of the Gospel in the things that Jesus says and does. In the words of Fr. Robert Barron, “Jesus consistently speaks and acts in the person of God.” Jesus says things like, “Your sins are forgiven”, “I and the Father are one”, “Something greater than the temple is here”, and as we heard today, “All power in Heaven and Earth has been given to me”. We know the people around him understood Him to be saying He was of the same essence as the Father, because of their reaction to his words, which was more often than not, a desire to kill Him for blasphemy.

To further complicate matters Jesus tells his disciples about yet another person; a paraclete, an advisor, or counselor, who would be sent to teach them in all truth. True to His word, the early Church had this amazing experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon them like a mighty rushing wind at Pentecost. They were galvanized and energized to go out and boldly proclaim that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. This was the data confronting the early Church. This was the evidence they had to put together; to try to understand. And so the Church, over the course of the first few centuries, honed her teaching by sharpening her doctrine against many false beliefs that were brought forward attempting to explain away these truths. Until in its most simple and pure form, we understand the Trinity to be three persons; The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; One God.

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The key insight that I hope you will take away from today is that the God of Christianity, the God revealed to us by Jesus of Nazareth, is a community of persons - a “Communion of Love”. St. Augustine spoke about the Trinity in terms of the relationships between the three persons. The Father is the lover, who gives everything He is, who pours all of Himself out in love to the Son. The Son is the beloved, who receives the love from the Father and in turn gives all of Himself, in love, back to the Father. This constant, eternal, and infinite exchange of love between the Father and the Son is so intense and so real that it “is” a third distinct person, the Holy Spirit. St. John captures this idea when he says simply, “God is love.” (1 John 4:16)

There are many reasons why this truth “God is love” is important to us; here are two of them. The first has to do with creation. When we look at the inner life of God in the Trinity, we see that God is totally complete within Himself. The infinite exchange of love has no need for anything or anyone else, so why does God create? Why do we exist? There is no logical reason, but then again, there is nothing logical about love. Love, by its nature, needs to be shared, and God wants to share His life with us. The Catechism, in the very first paragraph states, “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life.” This means we are created out of sheer goodness and God has a plan for us. We are meant to share in His blessed life. Our existence is not some cosmic accident. It means our lives are meant to have meaning and purpose. We are made to share in God’s life, and when we begin to live our lives according to His plan, we find the fulfillment we seek. This is truly “Good News”.

The second reason the truth “God is Love” is important is that the closest human analogy we have to the Trinity is marriage. St. Pope John Paul II built his stunningly beautiful teaching “Theology of the Body” on this idea. In the ideal Christian marriage, the husband so loves his wife that he gives all of himself to her for her good; everything he is, emotionally, intellectually, and

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physically. The wife receives his love and returns that love with all of herself for his good; with everything she is, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. This exchange of love between them can be so intense and so real, that it too can become an entire other person, a child. It is very important for all of us to realize that all those difficult and unpopular Church teachings on family, marriage, and human sexuality flow from the Doctrine of the Trinity. We need to understand that we have all those difficult teachings, not because sex is something dirty; we have them because our sexuality is meant to be something holy, and our families are meant to be sacred. This too is “Good News”.

What are we supposed to do when we are confronted with all this “Good News”? What is the appropriate response to these amazing gifts we have received from God; such as the gifts of our existence and our families? In today’s Gospel our Lord tells us what our response should be, and He tells us in a very authoritative way. He gives us our mission. He tells us to go and make disciples of all nations. He tells us to share this good news with all the world.

Well just exactly how are we supposed to do that? I have to go back to that talk by Curtis Martin – it was actually a talk on evangelization and discipleship. He had a wonderful explanation of discipleship. He started out by saying that Catholics kind of struggle with exactly what discipleship means, and what we need to do is go back and look at what Jesus did. Jesus didn’t Tweet the Gospel. He didn’t set up a web page or a Face Book page in order to reach as many people as possible. What He did was get twelve guys together, and then He took them camping for three years. Why would He do that? Other than He is the Lord, and He likely knows the best way to accomplish His mission. What He did was enter into a relationship with each of those men; becoming part of their lives and journeying with them. Curtis Martin’s definition of discipleship is then, “an intentional friendship ordered towards heaven.” What does that mean? If I have a friend

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who asks me to run a marathon with him. We agree to train together, to follow the workout program, to eat right, to do all those things you need to do to be able to run a marathon. I also give him permission to call me out when I don't live up to my end of the bargain. If I miss a workout or go to coffee and donuts and eat a half dozen jelly donuts, he is going to call me to account, and I will do the same for him. That is an intentional friendship ordered toward running a marathon. The goal of the Christian life is to get to Heaven. Discipleship is then entering into a friendship with another person with the goal of helping each other get to Heaven. I don't mean barely sneaking in the back door. I mean calling each other to account and doing all those things we need to do in order to burst right through that front door. I am talking about all-in, radical, Christianity. Healthy, but radical Christianity. That is discipleship; an intentional friendship ordered toward Heaven.

Why does Jesus call us to participate in this great work? I don't know, but I am pretty sure it has something to do with giving us that meaning and purpose in our lives. I also understand that the idea of sharing your faith with someone, with entering into their life and letting them into yours, can be quite daunting. The mission of the parish is to help you work through those concerns, and we are looking at a number of different approaches to help equip you for your mission. We have a lot of work to do. Each of us has a unique mission. Each of us has a "mission field", those in our families, in our workplace, and in the other areas of our lives, who nobody else can reach. The Lord wants us to reach out to them, because He thinks they are worth it. He wants us to offer this "Good News" to them, because He loves them, and because He loves them, He asks us to love them as well. Certainly it seems Our Lord could have found much more worthy instruments to share in this great work of salvation, but He has chosen us, because we are His, and He died for us. He thinks we are worth it.