

Homily Fest of Holy Trinity – June 7, 2020:

Concerning the Trinity, once in a while someone will come up to me and say “one plus one plus one equals three.” To which I will reply, “and one times one times one equals one.” I always think that is going to start a conversation - using the difference between addition and multiplication as an illustration of the difference between the Nature of God, and the Persons of God. But it normally ends the conversation. And not in a good way. The person just walks away still convinced that One God and Three Persons is just bad math.

Much of what we experience in the world seems only to make sense when seemingly contradictory explanations describe the same phenomenon. One of the famous examples for decades has dealt with the nature of Light. A wave and a particle are two different things. However, experiments with Light and the mathematics describing those observations tell us that Light acts sometimes as a wave and sometimes as a particle. The complete picture is more awesome than a simple model or analogy.

It is hard to grasp the awesome mystery of God. It is also hard to grasp the mystery of the human person. It would be good to start with humanity as our main example.

People are hard to describe. We are both individuals, and yet are meant to live in relation to each other.

All of the political systems and economic systems in the world fall short of what they can be because they do not take into account the complete human person.

One system might see us as individuals who make social contracts – and so the very social nature of the person is pushed to the back seat. Such a philosophy protects the value of the individual, but reduces nations, communities, even the family – to a social construct that can be redefined at the snap of a finger. And they do not support the universal call to look out for others that lies within the very conscience of each person.

Another world view might emphasize the social aspect of human nature – but they conceive individuals as cogs in a giant machine, as disposable fodder for rulers.

It is only when the human person is treated in His or Her totality – as an individual of inestimable value and as a being whose very nature is in relation to others – can societies be what they must be.

In philosophy we call it an error to take an incomplete way of looking at humanity and trying to shoehorn every other aspect of the person into that small worldview. And in theology we call it a heresy when we do the same thing in regard to God.

Heresy does not live on its falsehood, but upon its truth. Heresy is taking part of truth, presenting it as the whole truth, and then squeezing everything else to fit into it. This does not work.

God has revealed something about His inner workings - Who He is. Some people find that too difficult, and then try to simplify it. Attempts are made that reduce God's self-revelation to: three gods; or one God that wears three masks; or God is so far beyond us that He cannot communicate anything of Himself to us; or God is the sum total of creation.

With anyone else that might be helpful. None of us knows ourselves perfectly. But God knows Himself perfectly; and knows us perfectly. Heresies do an injustice to the very one who told us who He is and what He is like.

God has revealed to us that God is Trinity.

The Nature of God, or WHAT God is, is that God is all-powerful and all-knowing and all-good and all-present. Obviously, then, even simply logic would tell us there can only be One God. You cannot have two or more entities that are completely and infinitely powerful yet separate, and thus in competition.

God has also revealed to us something of WHO God is – God is three persons. God's very self can be described as a community of love. God is love.

God has also revealed to us that, even though we are finite, we have been made in His Image and Likeness. And love is one of the keys to being God's image. Because love requires more than one person.

And so we come to the Family – The Domestic Church. It is in the basic unit of the family where persons are recognized as having a dignity within themselves and also find their purpose and meaning in relationship with others.

The importance of family is worth emphasizing. I once heard the following: “Catholic social teaching could be summed up by saying - something is good or bad for society only to the degree that it is good for bad for the family.”

Or, as Saint John Paul the Second was quoted: “As the family goes, so goes the nation and the whole world.”

Yes, some of us live alone. And yes, most of us spend our whole lives needing to increase our ability to relate to others within the family. Still...

Family is meant to be where the theological rubber hits the road. It is supposed to be the basic place of safety. It is supposed to be a place we learn we are unconditionally loved. It is supposed to be the school that teaches us how to be responsible to others.

It is in family that we begin to understand that Marriage is a Sacrament. We are meant to see God when we look at a Family.

Family is supposed to be where we experience love, individuality, and community. When we experience this, we understand the Father and Son and Holy Spirit in a way we cannot always put into words. The Holy Trinity makes sense in our bones and in our blood.

We need to build up the family. We need to pray for all families. It is only then that speaking of Church as family, or a community as family, can have any meaning.

And it is only then that this world can see how to respect each person’s dignity and also be responsible for the larger community they are in. If all humans have dignity, then all lives matter. And if all lives matter, then black lives matter.

My brothers and sisters, when we make visible – when we reveal - our respect for each person and our concern for the **whole** community, others might then recognize and desire the God revealed in Christ – the God who is unity and also three distinct-but-not-separate persons. The God who is a communion of Love.