

Homily

May 17-18, 2008

Who is God for you? That is a question to stop a conversation or empty a room, even of learned and devout Christians. It is at once a very personal question (since we each experience God in a unique way) and a very broad one. The phrase “for you” is important, since the God whom we Christians worship is not an abstract principle or an “unmoved mover” who created the world and let it run on its own. No, the God whom we acknowledge and worship is “for us,” has entered into a personal relationship with us and cares for us both individually and communally.

On reflection we should find it easy to begin to answer the question “Who is God for you?” because we stand in a theological tradition that can help us speak about who God is. We derive that tradition from the Scripture and from statements issued by early church councils. Those councils made definitions about the nature of God (one God in three persons) and Christ (human and divine). Those conciliar definitions made sense of and gave system to what the Scriptures say about God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They were necessary from the perspective of history and remain foundational for Christian faith throughout the ages.

Yet if we look at the Scripture readings from Trinity Sunday, we will find a different emphasis, one that is also necessary and important. We will find that the Scriptures emphasize how we relate to God and how God relates to us. There is always a personal, relational and experiential dimension to what the Scriptures say about God. A good starting point for grasping the biblical understanding of God is the final verse (13:13) of Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians. It is familiar to most Catholics today because it has become the greeting most often used at the beginning of Mass in many parishes. It can provide a useful framework for reflecting on today’s other texts from Exodus 34 and John 3:16-18.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.... The word “grace” in a theological context refers to divine favor. In Christ, God has shown favor toward us humans, a special care for us and a desire that through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection we might find and

enjoy right relationship with God. Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, is proof of God's loving care for us. This recognition has been captured most memorably in the words of John 3:16: "For 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." Christ is God's gift to us, the ultimate sign of God's favor, God's grace incarnate. How we respond to that grace is our gift to God.

And the love of God..... We often use the phrase "the love of God" to describe our response to God and our duty to love God. That is both correct and appropriate. But what comes first is God's love for us. The Scriptures emphasize that God has loved us first and that our love for God is only a fitting response. Today's reading from Exodus 34 is as close as the Bible come to giving a definition of God. According to that text, the Lord is "a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity." Every part of that statement stresses God in relationship to humankind, and it emphasizes especially God's great love for us. This is no distant and impersonal God. This is no first principle or deity or even a "higher power." This is a God who loves us with a mother's love, as the Hebrew word translated "merciful" (derived from the word for womb, *rechem*) suggests. This is a God who shows infinite patience with us, enters our lives, acts within our history, forgives our sins and works for our salvation. The passage from Exodus 34 goes on to remind us also of the justice of God. The two most prominent divine attributes in the Bible are justice and mercy; usually divine mercy wins out over divine justice. This is the God whom we call "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.... On Pentecost Sunday we celebrated the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles 50 days after Easter and the abiding presence of the Spirit in the church throughout history and today. The Holy Spirit guides, empowers and teaches in Christ's place. The Holy Spirit brings us together in faith, love and hope. The Holy Spirit shapes and animates the life of the Christian community. We live our Christian lives in the fellowship, or *koinoni*, formed by the Holy Spirit.

Debbie and I were watching the Food Channel the other day and Paula Deen was making a "One Pot Meal". And yes, Debbie and I are easily entertained! At any rate,

Paula says she always puts in her Trinity which consists of bell peppers, onions, and celery.

I reflected on that the Real Trinity could be our “One Pot Spiritual Meal”. We have the steadfastness of God the Father, Christ is with us in the Eucharist, and on a daily basis we have our advocate the Holy Spirit. You would probably want some kind of meat to finish off this meal. What could that be? Of course, the people, you and I!

I know this is corny, but it helps to explain to me the concept of three persons in one God as the Trinity. Use whatever works for you to explain “Who is God for You?”