

## A Strange God

What do you think about when you think about God?

What is the character of God?

Who does God care about, and perhaps more to the point, how does God care?

Where might we look to catch glimpses of God in our world?

Is God the ultimate meaning of all things, or is God simply a projection of my own wishes and desires?

These are just a few of the questions the church invites us to sit with on this very unusual feast day; for today is Trinity Sunday.

Most Sundays focus on the teachings of Jesus, while Trinity Sunday is the only day we celebrate a doctrine of faith.

Yes, yes, your eyes are getting sleepy...., but before you check out of this sermon altogether, give me just a moment to convince you that what we celebrate today really does matter; it matters a lot!

Many folks over the years have taken stabs at how to help us think about the Trinity, and many more simply throw up their hands and say forget it!

After all, how do you get One God in Three Persons but still One God??

Our dear friend Fr. Frank Chun, who will stand in this pulpit in just two weeks, talks about the Trinity from the point of view of a mango.

The mango is a single piece of fruit, not three fruits, but it is made up of skin, flesh and pit – three parts, one fruit.

Others will point to water: how we experience it as liquid, gas or ice: every one of them water, but in different forms.

Still others will mention Uncle Jimmy Kealoha, and point out that Uncle Jimmy is an uncle, a husband and a friend: same guy, but one who relates to others in three different ways.

One of the most popular books to hit the bookstands in the last few years is called *The Shack*.

It's a story of a fellow who suffers a terrible tragedy and then comes face to face with the Holy Trinity in the woods, at a cabin.

God the father turns out to be a heavy set African American woman who loves to cook.

Jesus is a blue jean wearing twenty something longhaired beatnik with nail holes in his wrists while the Holy Spirit is a wispy girl who comes and goes, appearing and disappearing as she please.

On the flip side of these popular examples are St. Augustine's 17 volumes dedicated to the Holy Trinity and Karl Barth's 1400 pages entitled *The Doctrine Of God*.

But it was St Thomas Aquinas, laying on his death bed, the author of countless books about the nature of God, who finally got it.

Looking over a lifetime of his best thinking, having been given a glimpse beyond the veil that hides from us the mystery of God, he said, as he lay dying: "Everything I have written is straw....it is all straw...."

When it comes to wondering about the Trinity, take whatever example you like, be it mangos or Shacks or the most difficult theology, but whatever you choose, don't hold onto it tightly – rather, hold it lightly, realizing that just as we cannot find words for our deepest feelings of love, so, in the end, words can never contain the mystery that is God.

The Master says to his students: "God is unknown and unknowable."

"Then why do we seek God," they ask?

The master answers the question with a question:

"Does the bird sing to say something or does the bird sing simply because it has a song?"

We seek the unknowable Mystery because it is that very Mystery which puts in us a song to sing, so that in the singing, something of the ultimate Mystery may tenderly reveal itself to us.

Too Zen for you?

Sit with it anyway, because at the end of the day, words fail: only quiet wonder remains.

You won't find the word Trinity anywhere in the Bible: but it is suggested, it is hinted at, it is always in the background, not only in the newer testament, but in the older one as well.

We hear it today in the song of Wisdom, who exists from the beginning, who says in her own words, "I am daily God's delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race."

Just so, when we listen in on the whisperings of the Trinity, it is delight and laughter and joy that come bubbling up and out.

Meister Eckhart says that the Father laughed and the Son is born, the Father and Son laugh together, and the Spirit is born; and when all three laugh, humanity is born.

The purpose of creation, the creation that the Trinity keeps alive every moment, with every breath: the purpose of creation is joy!

And our constant struggle is to become transformed so that we might live that joy!

One of our members remarked to me last week how at peace he feels after taking part in the Mass, and yet, he also recognized a resistance that pops up often when he thinks of attending Mass.

Something about our fallen nature has the daily tendency to turn us into grumpy old men, when our true destiny is joy!

Perhaps that is the insight of St. Paul this morning, recognizing that our own transformations come as we each of us struggle, each in our own way, each with our own issues, our own demons, to let go of certainties and prejudices and resentments that keep the door to joy closed.

Paul knows from bitter experience that this transformation comes only at a great price, and yet by paying the price, he comes to see that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint....”

If you say yes to this God who is One in Three and Three in One, expect the ride to be bumpy; change may come quickly or it may come slowly, but you will be changed, because this is the one guarantee we get: responding to God discombobulates every person who signs up and signs on.

Don't take my word for it: look at St. Peter who started life fishing for trout and ended his life hanging upside down on a Roman cross; or Paul; that ramrod Jew who left it all behind to tell the world about a God who so delights in humanity as to become one of us; a God who is rejected to his face; yet through it all, and despite it all; walks out of the tomb after three days with these three words on his lips: “I love you.”

Living into the mystery that is the Trinity might sometimes be like living in a marriage.

Once the wedding lights have dimmed and the hot-blooded passion cools, we come to realize that we're in for something much tougher, and yet much deeper and more profound than we ever dared to imagine.

The Christian life, truly lived, is always an adventure!

I'm reminded of the Readers Digest story about the little Catholic girl who jumped into the middle of the aisle swinging her mom's rosary at the end of her finger, all the while yelling: “Hold on Jesus, we're going for a ride!”

As you know I'll be leaving soon for distant lands.

In preparing for this trip I met with our bishop the other day.

He mentioned that the bishop that I am staying with in East Africa is part of a break-away faction from the Episcopal Church.

Bishop Ruben Lubanga belongs to a group known as the Evangelical Episcopal Church.

Our bishop's comment got me thinking about all of the splits that we have in

our church today; splits that began in the earliest years of the church, splits that were seismic like the Reformation and the splits that are continuing today.

Most of the time we bemoan most of these splits and figure that they must cause God substantial grief.

I have to say that while meditating upon the mystery of the Trinity all week, I wonder if we have it all wrong.

If the unity that we seek is one church where everyone believes the same thing and prays the same way and worships in the same way I'm not sure that that's what God has in mind; and I'll tell you why.

The great prayer of Jesus is that we be one as God is one.

And the question becomes: How is God one?

This Trinity Sunday, we are called to remember that God is One in Three; Three in One; Unity in Diversity.

If we are called to be One like God is one, then perhaps we are to look around at all of creation; not only the endless numbers of Christian denominations but to look as well to our Jewish siblings and Muslim brothers and Buddhist sisters and Hindu cousins and yes, even non-believers, and see that we are all of us part of a grand and glorious orchestra that is, in ways we may never completely comprehend, giving glory to the living God.

In these meanderings of mine, I imagine our Pentecostal friends, who sing and shout and speak in tongues, perhaps these are the flute section.

Perhaps the Roman Catholics are the sturdy bass section with the Evangelicals taking up the cymbals and the drums.

Can our Muslim friends be the long trombones while the Buddhists strum softly upon the harps?

Perhaps in the same way that the people of Babel were scattered because they sought God with one voice, so too, perhaps we today are scattered, so that in humility, we might find in each other, the unity that harmonizes with the diversity that is God.

I know – more Zen sounding stuff....

But when we sit before the Holy Trinity, it may be that holding paradox in our hands, gently and patiently, is the doorway into its deeper mysteries.

My prayer for you, as we say aloha for now, is this:

May we find, this Trinity Sunday, in those who differ from us, the song of God and may we love and respect each other; all of us children of the one Creator who is known to us in diversity.

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