

FATHER, SON, AND SPIRIT
A Sermon for Trinity Sunday, 2011
On the Text: Propers for the Day
By the Reverend Doctor Randolph Constantine

Today we have the interesting and meaningful conjunction of Trinity Sunday with the secular holiday of Fathers' Day. Each Sunday, in Church, we say we celebrate whatever day that Sunday is on the Church Calendar. I'm not sure that we really celebrate Fathers' Day. Mostly what we do is that we sort of observe it. After all, if one takes a very cynical view, Father's Day, like Mothers' Day, is just another Hallmark holiday, a day given a name by some government official in order to enhance the health of the economy by promoting the sale of greeting cards and other gifts. I am not that cynical, at least not any more; I was once long ago, when to be cool, you had to be cynical about such things. But you see, there happens to be that little commandment that God gave Moses along with nine others on one of two pieces of stone. I'm thinking about the fifth one, the one that says, "[Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.](#)"

We should not need a special day to honor fathers, any more than we need a special day to honor mothers. They should be honored every day, just as we should honor the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit every day. But perhaps we do need to have such days to cause us to think about the significance of our human fathers and mothers in our lives just as we think about the significance of the Trinity.

I don't know what prompted me to do it, but for some reason I decided to go look up the word, *celebrate*, in the Oxford English Dictionary to see what I could find out about its origin and original meaning. What I found was a surprise, actually, two surprises. the first surprise was that *Celebrate* is from the Latin, and there is no word in Greek that means anything like it that has similar sounds. In Latin, it was *Celebrare*, and one of the forms was *celebratus*. It seems that we did not get the word in English by way of the French; we got it directly from the Latin, probably through the Church. The second surprise was that the original meanings are nowhere near what we mean by the word today. Only in a recent American dictionary do we find the word defined as, "to observe an occasion with festivities." Fireworks, Loud talking, Drinking, and partying were not part of what celebration used to mean. The primary definition of *celebrate* is still, "to honor in a solemn ceremony with a great assembly." The examples given

include the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, or the observance of a feast day of the Church. Now joy can certainly be part of a celebration, as it is with Christmas and Easter; however, according to that old and standard definition, even a funeral is a celebration.

So, yes, we celebrate Trinity Sunday, and we celebrate Fathers' Day, just as we celebrated Mother's Day a few weeks ago. As I thought about this, it came to me that each of these celebrations is a celebration of a family, first, in each case, of a nucleus, and then secondly of an extended family that includes all of us with the Family of God in His three persons.

On Trinity Sunday, we try to wrap our brains around the concept of a god, our God, the only God, who is only *one* God, but in three Persons. This gets us into theology. It gets deep and makes our heads hurt. It seems to defy logic. To one man once, his idea of logic said that a bumblebee could not possibly fly. But the bumblebees kept refuting him by existing and flying off to look for flowers. Logic is a tool, but it doesn't work very well if your basic assumptions are wrong. What we assume about God is often wrong not because we attribute too much to Him, but because we tend to think of Him as just sort of an enhanced human. Logic tells us that Jesus could not possibly walk half way across the Sea of Galilee to get to the boat the disciples were in, but He did. More than two witnesses saw it, and we have the record of that witness. Shall we call them liars? We have the record of that evidence. It's called the Bible.

It is in reading the Bible that we begin to learn theology. The Bible is where we read things that make us ask questions; and by reading more in it, we begin to find some answers. When we begin to ask questions, we are engaging in theology. That doesn't make us theologians any more than wondering why somebody behaves in a strange way makes us a psychologist, but it is a beginning. I recently got a copy of a book about the theology of Austin Farrer, in which the former Dean of the Cathedral at York in England is quoted as saying this, "**Religion without theology is like a body without a skeleton: it lacks that which stiffens and steadies it; it becomes flabby and weak and sentimental.**" So let's see if we can't put something of a skeleton into the body of the Doctrine of the Trinity.

We begin in the beginning: in Genesis 1:1, with "In the beginning, God ..." Later in Exodus, God makes Himself known to Moses in the burning bush and sends him to Egypt to begin a story we all know. In the last part of that story in Deuteronomy, Moses distills all that he has learned about God, His theology if you will, into one sentence in Deuteronomy 6:4 **4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!** This is the fundamental belief of Judaism. It is called

the *Shema*, which is the first word of it in Hebrew. *Shema* means Hear, (Listen). By the time you finish reading the entire OT, you will have gotten the idea that not only is God, One; but that God is the only One. It is not just that Thou shalt not have other gods before Him; it is that there really aren't any other gods that are really gods. There may be other things that someone worships; but they are false gods, not necessarily idols or graven images, but false gods nonetheless; and whatever it is that anyone worships that is not God Himself, that worship is idolatry, and the object being worshipped is an idol, even if it only exists as a figment in that person's mind.

When we get to the end of the OT, we find that, although there are many prophecies of a Savior, there is no mention of the "Son of God" anywhere in the OT. There are, however, three mentions of the Holy Spirit, one in Psalm 51, and two in Isaiah 63. Without knowledge of the NT, those three mentions of the Holy Spirit in the OT would likely be interpreted by the Jews as just generic metaphors for the Spirit of God, a spirit of holiness and righteousness. None of the prophecies of the Messiah that I know of would seem to indicate that the Messiah will in fact be the Son of God. The Jews thought He would be a particularly blessed and powerful person, but still just a person. They got more than they bargained for – a whole lot more.

When we begin reading the four Gospels, we find the phrase, "Son of God" occurring very early in each of them: in Matthew 4:3; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:35; and John 1:34. But it is in the Gospel of St. John that we learn that the Son of God is God. It is right there in John 1:1 that we read that: "...the Word was God."; and then in verse 14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Just about anybody can put those two together and come up with the fact that there are two persons, the Father and the Son, and that each of them is God, since we already knew that the Father was, and is, God.

Now this didn't shock the Romans or the Greeks because their religions were polytheistic from the beginning. The only thing that might have bothered them was that the Son was not called "a God" or a "demigod", but that He was called God, equally with the Father. In fact, before the Holy Spirit was recognized to also be God, this led to a heresy called **duitarianism**, that God was two in one.

To fill out the Trinity by realizing that the Holy Spirit is also God, and yet a separate person within God took a while. As far as we know, the first person to put it together was a lay theologian named Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, which in English we shorten to Tertullian.

He wrote in Latin and used the term, *Trinitas*, to describe the union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Even if I took as long as I did last Sunday, I would not have time enough to adequately explain how this was decided. Jesus spoke often of the Holy Spirit, even to indicate that He, and yes, the Holy Spirit is a He, as described in the Greek, even though the word for spirit is neuter. In fact, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as someone Who is, in a way, to be more honored than He is, when in Matthew 12:31-32, He tells us of the Unforgiveable Sin: **31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.** Later, in John 14:26 we read of Jesus' saying to the disciples, **26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.** This is a little cryptic; the Helper, and the Comforter, are both identified as the Holy Spirit, but we are not yet given any information that would lead us to expect that this is a person who is God until just a little later, in John 15:26, where Jesus says, **26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.** Now we are told the Helper is **"the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father"**. Things now become a little more clear. The Holy Spirit is not just someone whom the Father sends; rather **He proceeds from the Father.**

At this point one begins scripture searches on the word, spirit, and the phrase, Spirit of God; and Lo and behold, there are many, many of them even in the OT: 92 instances of Holy Spirit, with only 3 in the OT; Spirit of God, 26 times with 14 of them in the OT; and just the word spirit alone, 515 verses with many of those having the phrase, "Spirit of the Lord" which appears 27 times, 23 of which are in the OT. All this is from the ESV. Other versions may vary. These kinds of searches tell us that the Holy Spirit was quite active in the OT as well as in the New.

Recognition of these facts inspired St. Augustine to write a little poem in Latin that was poetically translated into English. Referring to the Old and New Testaments, he said this:

"The New is in the Old concealed;
The Old is in the New revealed."

Thus, the Spirit of God is God just as the Son of God is God. Each is only partially revealed in the OT. But then the Spirit is more fully revealed in Christ, and then even more so in His work from Pentecost on.

Perhaps this raises more questions than it answers. My hope is only that I have answered some questions about the Trinity. I would not dare think I could answer them all, even if I had a hundred years to try to find the answers, because I think of the Trinity as a mystery; and it is such a mystery that I am not sure we will be capable of understanding it even after being resurrected in glorified bodies.

Let me return to Father's day, and the idea of family. In the "family" of the Trinity, we have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bound together by a Love so deep that we cannot begin to understand it. In many Human families today, the family is broken; it is no longer in the image of the family that God ordained in the last 4 verses of Genesis 2. There may be no Father, or there may be no mother. In areas of war, or even here in the United States there are orphans who have neither father or mother to nurture them and teach them. Much to the chagrin of the rabid feminists and of the gay lobby, recent research has shown that the family as God designed it, with a father and mother living together in the same house or apartment is the most stable and best environment for the raising of children. Who woulda thunk it, that God might design something that worked better than anything humans could design, that worked better than any other human design even in a purely secular world?

Better yet is that there is something even better than just that bare idea of a human family I just gave. That human family all by itself, as I described it, is missing something that ought to be obvious, God. That something that would be better is what we get when the human family is part of God's family, but even the purely human family that is modeled after God's model is better than anything else that does not have God in its life, because the purely human family has a spirit of family even when made up of agnostics. That spirit or sense of family give gives even the most secular of them something to hold onto and to rally around when times are tough. I titled this sermon, Father, Son, and Spirit, leaving out the word, Holy, because I wanted to emphasize that this idea of the Spirit of Family is such a positive force even in the secular world that it has to be from God. After all, there is nothing in this world that is not from Him. Even Satan was created by Him.

It ought to be obvious though that the family that has all its members and worships our Lord Jesus Christ will be even better and stronger because it is held together not just by that spirit of family, but by the Holy Spirit. We can't do better than that on this earth.

On this Fathers' Day that is overshadowed by the Trinity, let us recognize that God the Father, through His Son Created the universe and all that is in it. That moment of Creation eventually led to us and this world we find ourselves in. This world seems bad enough, but think of what it must have been like before that Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, came and inspired those who wrote the New Testament. We now can have the vision of being members of a Family Whose Head is God the Father, with us as brothers and sisters of His only Son, united in spirit by the Holy Spirit of that Family. That is a vision I pray will come true for all of us.

AMEN!