

When my godson Caleb was about to make his first communion, I asked him a few questions about God. He responded confidently that God is a Trinity. "What is that?" I asked. "One God in 3 persons," he said very matter-of-fact. "I find that difficult to understand," I said. "You're not supposed to understand, stupid. It's a mystery." And thus enlightened, I asked no more questions.

We say that theology is the study of God and His ways. Frederick Buechner writes: "For all we know, dung beetles may study man and his ways and call it humanology. If so, we would probably be more touched and amused than irritated. One hopes that God feels likewise." Maybe God will be amused by my homily; possibly even you. Or maybe you and God will all be just plain irritated. So I apologize ahead of time!

Trinity Sunday – sounds tailor-made for 3 points! I got this! Kallistos Ware wrote that "it is not the task of Christianity to provide answers to every question, but to make us progressively aware of a mystery. God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder." But our IMAGE of God has a lot to do with our spirituality – and how we view others and our world. Richard Rohr, in his book on the Trinity called THE DIVINE DANCE, writes this: "As long as we have a Zeus-notion of God, we can't make much spiritual progress. He is a power-hungry, remote-control god at the top of the hierarchy of gods, throwing down thunderbolts and favoring a very few chosen ones. He is always a he; he is almighty, but not equally all-vulnerable, as the Trinity is. Our collective and cultural understanding of God hasn't moved much beyond the 'Almighty God' language we took for granted; we haven't realized that God has forever redefined divine power IN the Trinity! The Christian God's power comes through His powerlessness and humility. Our God is much more properly called all-vulnerable than almighty, which we should have understood by the constant metaphor of 'Lamb of God' found throughout the New Testament. But unfortunately, for the vast majority, He is still 'the man upstairs.' .... In my opinion, this failure is at the basis of the vast expansion of atheism, agnosticism, and practical atheism we see....today. Most modern people seem to be saying 'If God is almighty, then I do not like the way this almighty God is running the world.' They do not know that the Trinitarian revolution never took root! We still have a largely pagan image of God." (adapted from THE DIVINE DANCE, p. 170-171).

Jesuit Fr. Gregory Boyle writes that we all have an image of God that can get tiny, if we're not careful. We all operate with an image of God that becomes the touchstone, the controlling principle, to which we return when we stray. He continues "My touchstone image of God comes by way of my friend and spiritual director, Bill Cain, S.J. Years ago he took a break from his own ministry to care for his father as he died of cancer. His father had become a frail man, dependent on Bill to do everything for him. Though he was physically not what he had been, and the disease was wasting him away, his mind remained alert and lively. In the role reversal common to adult children who care for their dying parents, Bill would put his father to bed and then read him to sleep, exactly as his father had done for him in childhood. Bill would read from some novel, and his father would lie there, staring at his son, smiling. Bill was exhausted from the day's care and work and would plead with his dad, "Look, here's the idea. I read to you, you fall asleep." Bill's father would impishly apologize and dutifully close his eyes. But this wouldn't last long. Soon enough, Bill's father would pop one eye open and smile at his son. Bill would catch him and whine, "Now, come on." The father would, again, oblige, until he couldn't anymore, and the other eye would open to catch a glimpse of his son. This went on and on, and after his father's death, Bill knew that this evening ritual was really a story of a father who just couldn't take his eyes off his kid. How much more so God? Anthony De Mello writes, 'Behold the One beholding you, and smiling.' God would seem to be too occupied in being unable to take Her eyes off of us to spend any time raising an eyebrow in disapproval. What's true of Jesus is true for us, and so this voice

breaks through the clouds and comes straight at us. "You are my Beloved, in whom I am wonderfully pleased." There is not much 'tiny' in that. (Tattoos on the Heart, p. 19-20)

You may have noted the feminine pronoun as well as the masculine. The English mystic Juliana of Norwich wrote in the 14<sup>th</sup> century: "As truly as God is our father, so, just as truly is God our mother. And God showed this in everything, especially in these sweet words, It is I. That is to say, It is I, the strength and goodness of fatherhood. It is I, the wisdom of motherhood. It is I, the light and grace of holy love. It is I, the Trinity. It is I, the unity. I am the sovereign goodness in all things. It is I who teach you to love. It is I who teach you to desire. It is I who am the lasting fulfillment of all true desire." (REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE)

Second, the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus, the Son. Brian Doyle speaks of Jesus in a playful and poetic way: "I chatted easily and often with my man Yesuah ben Joseph, a skinny gnomish guy like me, a guy with a motley crew of funny brave hard-working bone-headed friends, a guy who liked to wander around outdoors, a guy who delighted in making remarks that were puzzling and memorable and riddish, a GUY."

We all have to answer the question of who Jesus is FOR ME. Here's what I could give you as something of an answer FOR ME. Jesus was a man who was in touch with His humanity, His manhood, though He is God's son. He was a man who experienced the same human longings and passions as we, though He never sinned. Down-to-earth, He was sensitive to human feelings. He was compassionate and not reluctant to show emotions of joy, sorrow, and even anger. He laughed and cried without apology or embarrassment.

A teacher. He was not sophisticated. He often preached in parables using images and realities with which people were familiar. He never hedged, never avoided the 'hard sayings,' but He took people where they were. He was not upset if at first they did not understand Him or even walked away.

A person of integrity. There were no contradictions in His message, His life, or His ministry. A lover. He constantly talked about love. When asked which is the greatest commandment, He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Mt 22:37-39) He invited people to share His love and be intimate with Him. This love would also connect people with His Father.

A patient man. He was not given to panic. He was stable. The one exception was His anger at the money changers in the temple. He was patient even with those who maligned Him, knowing that in the end His truth would prevail. He was able to convince others by the sheer power of His personality and message.

A man who understood that suffering and death were the key to ultimate success, His resurrection. We can expect no less. (adapted from Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, CHURCH, Spring 1997, p. 5-6)

And this leads us to imitation of Him. One of the reasons I remain a Catholic-in progress is the peculiar insistence that God is revealed in humankind – not just in human form but also in human being. This insistence shows up most often in the Christian claim that God was made known in Jesus. In Jesus, we believe, everyone gets a good look at what it means to be both fully human and fully divine – not half and half, as if He walked around with a dotted line down His middle, but fully both, all the time. His full humanity was on full display as He taught, healed, fed, and freed people, just as it was when He honored the poor, defied the powerful, and turned the temple tables along with His own cheek.....

But my advice is not to overthink this, since thinking about it will not only make us crazy but will also take us out of the world where we can practice being fully human ourselves. Jesus clearly thought this was the best plan. When people wanted Him to tell them what God's realm was like, He told them stories about

their own lives. When people wanted Him to tell them God's truth about something, He asked them what they thought. With all kinds of opportunities to tell people what to think, He told them what to do instead. Wash feet. Give your stuff away. Share your food. Take care of the marginalized. Pray for those who are out to get you. Be the first to say, "I'm sorry." For those who took Him as their model, being fully human became a full-time job. It became a vocation in itself, no matter what they happened to do for a living. (Adapted from Barbara Brown Taylor, *AN ALTAR IN THE WORLD*, p. 118-119)

Third, God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is that aspect of God that works largely from within and at the deepest levels of our desiring, as so many mystics have said. That's why the mystical tradition could only resort to subtle metaphors like wind, fire, descending doves, and flowing water to describe the Spirit. More than anything else, the Spirit keeps us connected and safely inside an already existing flow, if we but allow it. We never 'create' or earn the Spirit; we discover this inner abiding as we learn to draw upon our deepest inner life.

There's a great line in Hermann Hesse's *STEPPENWOLF*, in which he says, "We have no one to guide us. Our only guide is our homesickness." Even Dorothy is guided forward to Oz and back to Kansas by her constant love and search for home. It is part of the reason the story has such lasting appeal. On the level of soul, these sources are all correct. Home is another word for the Spirit that we are, our True Self in God. *THE SELF-SAME MOMENT THAT WE FIND GOD IN OURSELVES, WE ALSO FIND OURSELVES INSIDE GOD*, and this is the full homecoming, according to Teresa of Avila. Until then we are homesick, although today most would probably just call it loneliness, isolation, longing, sadness, restlessness, or even a kind of depression.

The common word for this inner abiding place of the Spirit, which is also a place of longing, has usually been the word *SOUL*. We have our soul already – we do not 'get' it by any purification process. The end is already planted in us at the beginning, and it gnaws away at us until we get there freely and consciously. The church is supposed to help "Fan this into flame" as 2 Timothy 1:6 says, and sometimes it does. But sometimes great love and great suffering are even bigger fans for this much-needed flame.

The good news is that there *IS* a guide, an inner compass – and it resides within each of us. "Included inside the box," as the ads always say. As the Scriptures put it, "The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5:5) In John 14:18 we are promised "You will not be left orphaned," without a mother or a home.

Almost all heroes of mythology heard an inner voice that spoke to them. In fact, their heroism was in their ability to hear that voice and to risk following it – wherever! Sadly, such inner comfort is the very thing we lack today at almost all levels. Our problem now is that we seriously doubt that there is any vital reality to the spiritual world, so we hear no life-changing voices.

For post-modern people, the universe is not inherently enchanted, as it was for the ancients. We think we have to do all the 'enchanting' ourselves. This leaves us alone, confused, and doubtful. We often do not think that there is meaning already in place for our discovery and enjoyment, and so we have to create all meaning by ourselves in such an inert and empty world, and most of us do not seem to succeed very well. This is the burden of living in our heady and lonely time, when we think it is all up to us. We are far too limited by our too small imaginations.

The *GIFT* of living in our time, however, is that we are more and more discovering that the sciences, particularly physics, astrophysics, anthropology, and biology, are confirming many of the deep intuitions of religion, and at a rather quick pace. The universe really is 'inspired matter,' we now know, and is not merely

inert. Now we might call it instinct, evolution, nuclear fusion, DNA, hardwiring, the motherboard, healing, growth, or just springtime, but nature clearly continues to renew itself from within, despite how cruelly we have so often treated our mother earth. God seems to have created things that continue to create and recreate themselves from the inside out. It is no longer God's one-time creation OR evolution; rather, God's form of creation precisely IS evolution. Finally, we are recognizing that God is fully incarnate, which was supposed to be Christianity's big trump card from the beginning! The Spirit continues to brood, hover over this creation, and God will have His way in the end. We need to open our hearts to receive the gift that has already been given. How blessed we are to have been given such a rich revelation in the Trinity! Amen. (Adapted from Richard Rohr, FALLING UPWARD, p. 90-94)

FOR PERSONAL USE ONLY