

Homily – God is a Relationship of Three

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As I begin today, I want to share with you an inverted triangle of phrases titled, “On Getting Along with People”.

The SIX most important words: "I admit I made a mistake."

The FIVE most important words: "You did a good job."

The FOUR most important words: "What do you think?"

The THREE most important words: "After you please."

The TWO most important words: "Thank you."

The ONE most important word: "We"

The LEAST important word: "I"

Relationships are not always easy and this inverted triangle provides some phrases of wisdom. These are phrases that can help us with our spirituality.

For me, spirituality is about relationships – relationship with God, relationship with others, relationship with self, and relationships with the rest of non-human creation.. This inverted triangle of wisdom phrases helps us with healthy relationships and by extension with healthy spirituality.

Today we have our annual celebration of the Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... or the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of Life. That three in one things with God. These three intimate loving relationships that never stop flowing with love are the three persons of the Trinity. The Father is the Father but the Father is also the Son and the Spirit. There is both unity and diversity in our image of the Trinity.

And, if we are to believe the Scriptures, then we can see that the Trinity is a circle dance of flow, communion, and relationship. The very nature of God is a constant flow and self-emptying of one into another. The creation stories in Genesis, that first book of the Bible, shows us this flow is the template for everything created. Every created thing is the self-emptying of God. God is constantly outpouring. Like a waterwheel of Divine love, the Father empties all of the Father into the Son. The Son receives and empties all of himself into the Spirit. The Spirit receives and empties all of herself into the Father. The Father receives and the cycle continues. That is the pattern of reality and of creation itself.

Now, many of us grew up with the notion of a static God at the top of a pyramid-shaped universe and all else beneath. Most Christian art and church design and architecture reflects this pyramidal worldview, which shows what little influence the concept of Trinity has had had in our history.

Today, I want to boldly proclaim, that we must begin with the Trinity if we are to rebuild Christianity from the bottom up. The Trinity is absolutely foundational to Christianity because it reveals the heart of the nature of God. And yet, as the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, pointed out, it has made almost no difference in the lives of the vast majority of Christians. That either means it's not true or that we just have not understood it.

I can tell you that in my own spiritual journey, I believe the concept of the Trinity is true, but we must move from dogma and doctrine to a level of experience. We must experience God as a flow and as a dance.

Now, have you ever noticed that you become the God you worship? In other words, your image of God creates you. If your image of God is of a punishing god, then that is also who you are yourself. If your image of God is of a flowing outpouring of love, then that is also who you are yourself.

Now this should be of concern to us, for if we get the image of God wrong, everything else that builds on it is going to be rather inadequate. That might seem like an overstatement, but let's recognize how that's been true in Western Christianity in particular.

The operative image of God for most Christians (except for the mystics) is a powerful monarch, usually an old white man sitting on a throne. It's no accident that the Latin word for God, Deus, came from the same root as Zeus. At the risk of shocking you, let me say that Christianity hasn't moved much beyond the mythological image of Zeus. Yet this is not the image of God revealed to us by Jesus—a vulnerable baby born in an occupied and oppressed land; a refugee; a humble carpenter whose friends were fishermen, prostitutes, and tax-collectors; a political criminal executed on a cross. In other words, Jesus shows a vulnerable God much more than the almighty one Christians often assume.

So, let us use the Trinity to move away from one view of God to another, and by extension let us also use the Trinity to move away from one view of ourselves to another view.

The Trinity is about the inner relationship of God and is a powerful reminder to us about the extreme importance of relationships. We live in a period of history that focuses on the individual and we live in America where this focus on the individual is powerfully celebrated.

We can point to the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle as having lifted up individuality as the basis of being. And, in, his 5th century book, "The Consolations of Philosophy, the philosopher, Boethius, build on Aristotle to define the human person as an individual substance of a rational nature. This focus on the

primacy of the individual is a leading tenant of twenty-first century America. It is all about me. Me, me, me...

You know what the second most requested song is at funerals? The Frank Sinatra song "My Way". For me this is the anthem for individualism. It is a powerful illustration of the thirst for power and control that are demonstrated in doing thing "my way". Interestingly, although "My Way" became Frank Sinatra's signature song, his daughter, Tina Sinatra says the legendary singer came to hate the song. He didn't like it. That song stuck, and he couldn't get it off his shoe. And, she said, he always thought the song was self-serving and self-indulgent.

We get trapped in the box of individualism, and this creates unhealthy people because the primacy of the individual is not true. Instead we must subsist in relationality. For you see, there is no such thing as separation in the universe. We are all radically connected, and science is starting to show this.

Atomic scientists looking through microscopes and astrophysicists looking through telescopes are seeing a similarity of pattern: everything is in relationship with everything else. Scientists and contemplatives alike are confirming that the foundational nature of reality is relational.

One note about this image of flow and dance that I am saying is our God of relationship. God is not the dancer but the dance itself! God is much more a dynamic verb than a static noun. God is constant flow.

And, you don't even need to understand this intellectually or theologically to participate in the flow of God. You are already there. Within your heart, body, and mind is an implanted flow toward life, goodness, love, communion, and connection. We are already an embodiment of this flow, though sometimes our minds get in the way.

This is the Good News that we have in our Trinity. This outpouring of love that is constantly moving has been planted in each one of us.

As I said earlier, we must begin with the Trinity if we are to rebuild Christianity from the bottom up. The Trinity is absolutely foundational to Christianity because it reveals the heart of the nature of God.

So, no matter if your dance is a line dance, the fandango or just widely ecstatic, let the circle dance of the Trinity rearrange your Christian imagination as we move away from a focus on "me" to a focus on the flow of the Trinity that connects us all.