

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



God in three persons

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 3:16-18; (R1) Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9; (R2) 2 Corinthians 13:11-13.

The other day, a priest friend's remark startled me. He said that St. Thomas was now only a name in the history of theology.

When I was at St. Bernard's Seminary, we had a great Thomist professor, Dr. Joseph C. Fenton. He used to thunder, "Nos ne cesses Thoma tueri!" — "Never cease to defend Thomas." Then he would say the two books used at the Council of Trent were the Bible and the Summa of St. Thomas.

Since Vatican II, there has been a glacial theological shift from the conceptualism of St. Thomas to the concretism of existentialism. To the Thomist, philosophy was the handmaiden of theology; to the existentialist, anthropology, sociology and depth psychology are.

What's this got to do with Trinity Sunday? A lot, in my opinion. I believe that much of the confusion about the faith today, much fuzzy-wuzzy expression of it, has happened because St. Thomas has been relegated to the bookshelves.

One thing Thomism brought to theology was springwater clarity regarding the mysteries of our faith. Were I to ask wherein lies the mystery of the Trinity, I wonder what answers would surface?

The Thomist would have no difficulty zeroing in on an answer. Like every philosopher, the Thomist makes distinctions; in this case, between "nature" and "person." Nature is the "whatness" of a being, the source of its activity. Person is the "whoness" of a being, the actor.

Nature is like a car, enabling one to do something, while person is like the driver of a car, the one responsible for what the car does. Some vehicles, like a hook-and-ladder firetruck, might demand two drivers; other vehicles, like a B-727, might require three pilots.

Human nature is finite — only one to a customer; each human being has only one human nature. But the divine nature is infinite and boundless, so that more than one person can possess it — three, to be exact.

Once this distinction between nature and person is clear, the definition of the Trinity becomes equally clear. The Trinity is three persons possessing one and the same divine nature — three whos and one what. "The Father and I are one" — one, because the Father and Son possess the same divine nature. The Father is a person distinct from the Son and the Son is a person distinct from the Father; hence the plural verb are.

Consequently, when we make the sign of the cross, we begin, "In the name of . . ." Notice that we do not use the plural "names," but the singular "name," which answers the question "what." There is only one "what" in the Trinity, only one divine nature.

Then we continue with the words, "of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The different names indicate that each person is distinct from the other: the Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Holy Spirit. The coordinate conjunction "and" designates that each person, though distinct, is equal to the other person.

And herein lies the mystery of the Trinity: how can a Son who proceeds from the Father be equal to Him, and how can the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son be equal to them? That's the mystery: the procession of one person from the other, with both being equal.

A little boy told his dad that he had learned in religion class that there are three persons in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinct yet equal to one another.

The lad's father smirked, "Son, how can you believe that? I'm your father and you're my son; certainly we are not equal — I existed before you!"

The boy paused for a moment, puzzled, and then asked, "But, Daddy, you weren't a father until I became a son, were you?"

Judaism, which has always been fiercely monotheistic, had little success in winning over pagans, who could not accept having only one God. To them, one God was a lonely God, an unhappy God. So they clung to their pantheons of gods and goddesses.

Christianity is also fiercely monotheistic; but, at the same time, Trinitarian. In the one God, Jesus revealed that there are three persons; therefore, God is not lonely, for three's a crowd. And since the Father is full of life, the Son full of truth and the Holy Spirit full of love, God is a happy God. For the least common denominator of happiness is to have life without end, truth without lack and love without limits.

One of the reasons Jesus revealed the Trinity to us was to teach us that heaven is not a glorified church service, with its worshippers plunking harps, singing "Alleluia." Rather, Jesus likened heaven to a wedding feast: a being married to three persons, who can give us all the life, all the truth and all the love our hearts can ever desire.

Cindy Bassett

The Bible Corner



Founding the new Church

No one in the huge crowd noticed the high priest standing there. Caiaphas was partially hidden from view by one of the huge stone pillars that adorned this area of the temple known as Solomon's Hall. Even so, no one seemed capable of diverting the people's fervent attention from the two men who stood before the crowd.

Caiaphas was well acquainted with Peter and John. Only a few days before, they had been arrested and brought before the high priest in the Jewish court. And still, these followers of Jesus persisted.

Caiaphas watched as one of the followers placed his hands over the eyes of a woman. In a few minutes, she cried out, "I can see! Praise God, I've been healed by you!"

The man named Peter addressed the crowd, saying, "This miracle has not occurred by our own power. Faith in Jesus Christ, the living Messiah, has restored her sight. You must believe in Jesus, and your sins will be forgiven."

Caiaphas frowned visibly at these proclamations. Just then, one of the temple agents caught sight of the high priests. "They have been warned repeatedly," the agent stated, guessing the thoughts of Caiaphas.

"And what was their response to your warning?" Caiaphas queried.

The agent hesitated; Caiaphas demanded concise answers. "They said that they must obey God, not man," he began slowly. "And that they will go on telling everyone about Jesus."

"And why weren't they arrested?" Caiaphas demanded.

"Sir, with all due respect, we've arrested them twice already. They've been jailed and beaten. And still they continue their daily services here. So many have heard about their healing powers and come to the temple with their sick. I fear a riot would occur if we were to arrest them again!" The agent paused, measuring Caiaphas' reaction. Then he added, "Everyone that comes to them has been healed. What charge shall we make against them?"

Caiaphas offered no reply. Instead he turned sharply on his heel and went directly to the chambers of his father-in-law, Annas.

"It seems we've made an error in judgment, Annas," Caiaphas snapped. "You were certain these followers of Jesus would disband. His death has only served to ignite their cause."

"What do you propose to do?" Annas asked calmly.

"Bar them from the temple!" Caiaphas said angrily. "I will not tolerate this charade!"

"A short-term solution," Annas observed. "They will just assemble somewhere else in Jerusalem. Besides, these men are Hebrews. We can't turn them away from the temple!"

"The doctrine they preach has nothing to do with Hebrew law. I will call the members of the Sanhedrin into a special session, and formal changes will be brought against them," Caiaphas declared.

The Sanhedrin convened the very next day. Caiaphas called the meeting to order, saying, "Despite our previous warnings, the followers of Jesus continue in their heresy. We must deal with them once and for all!"

One of the Pharisees stood and said, "This is a delicate matter and must be handled carefully. Rumor has it that there are as many as 5,000 who adhere to these beliefs."

"If something is not done soon," someone else offered, "our own temple offerings will suffer the consequences. Those who join with them are willing to give up everything in support of this cause. Some have even sold their land holdings and all of their possessions and given the money to the leaders. They share everything in common!"

"A noble concept," Caiaphas replied sarcastically. "But nothing in our law prevents them from doing this!"

"They teach a false doctrine about resurrection from the dead and a promise of eternal life for all who believe in Jesus," said one of the Sadducees. "That is blasphemy and punishable by death."

This last remark brought a long silence. Annas, who hadn't yet offered an opinion on the situation, stood and said, "We must not allow our emotions to force us into imprudent actions. If the leaders are put to death, it may have just the opposite effect, as in the case of Jesus. We are dealing with something out of the ordinary here. I questioned these two men, Peter and John, myself. They are so strong in their convictions that, if necessary, they are quite willing to die rather than deny them."

Meanwhile, as the council continued to debate these circumstances, Peter and John spoke of the same things.

"It's just as the Master promised," Peter remarked. "The Spirit has given us the ability to perform the same miracles. Our work bears much fruit already. So many come to join the movement!"

"Do you also remember the horrible things Jesus said we would suffer for His sake?" John said. "We will be accused and beaten and even put to death!"

"This time, I am ready," Peter said, reflecting on his former denial of Jesus. "I am willing to die for Him!"

"I believe you, Peter," John said kindly. "But we must pray for the new believers. They come to us because of signs and wonders. Their faith is new and untested. Pray they are not put to the test too soon!"

Meditation: "The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church."

Scripture Reference: Acts, Chapter 5:12-42.

Obituaries

Monsignor Arthur E. Ratigan, 76, pioneer in care for the elderly



Monsignor Arthur E. Ratigan, former director of Catholic Charities and pastor emeritus of St. Ambrose Church, Rochester, died at St. Ann's Home on June 3, 1987, after an extended illness.

Monsignor Ratigan, born in Syracuse on February 18, 1911, of the late Arthur and Mary Ann Ratigan, attended Aquinas Academy and St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries. He was ordained to priesthood in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rochester, by Cardinal Edward Mooney on June 6, 1936, and was subsequently awarded a master of science degree in social work by The Catholic University of America in 1942.

After three years as associate pastor of St. Francis Xavier and Corpus Christi churches, Monsignor Ratigan served as chaplain of St. Mary's Boys' Home and chaplain of St. Joseph's Villa. In 1953, he was appointed director of Catholic Charities and the Columbus Civic Center. In 1956, Pope Pius XII honored him as a domestic prelate with the title of Right

Reverend Monsignor.

Monsignor Ratigan was pastor of St. Ambrose Church from 1963 to 1971, when he resigned to serve as associate pastor of several parishes until his retirement in 1974. The indefatigable Monsignor remained active even after retirement and became closely associated with every phase of ministry at St. Joseph's Church, Wayland, until his physical infirmities prevented further service.

Monsignor Ratigan was known nationally

Monsignor Harold F. Prendergast, 76, native Rochesterian, in Peoria, Illinois

Monsignor Harold F. Prendergast, a native Rochesterian who attended Sacred Heart Grammar School and graduated from Aquinas Institute, died on May 15, 1987, in the Christian Buehler Memorial Home in Peoria, Illinois. He was 76.

Monsignor Prendergast was born in Rochester on September 20, 1910. He attended St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's Seminaries before graduating from St. Bonaventure Seminary in Erie, Pennsylvania. He was ordained to the priesthood on May 18, 1939, and served as assistant pastor for two Illinois parishes in 1940 and 1941.

as a leader in Catholic Charities. He was a pioneer in the field of skilled care for the elderly, and led in both the planning and construction of St. Ann's Home. Monsignor Ratigan was a talented administrator who attracted a number of highly capable professionals to serve within the Catholic Charities organization. The present Social Ministry Division of the Diocese of Rochester is grounded on the foundation laid by Monsignor Ratigan, and is a lasting tribute to his memory.

Monsignor Prendergast was appointed pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Camp Grove, Illinois, in 1949, and of Immaculate Conception Church in Monmouth, Illinois, in 1960. In 1969, he served as dean (episcopal vicar) in Monmouth and later as prelate of honor to Pope Paul VI in 1970.

After serving at a number of other parishes and missions in Illinois, he retired as pastor in 1980. Having been appointed vicar of the Monmouth vicariate in 1974, he continued to serve as vicar until the time of his death.

Monsignor Prendergast served on the diocesan marriage board and also worked at St.

The Mass of Christ the High Priest was celebrated at Saint Joseph's Church, Wayland, on June 5, 1987, at 7:30 p.m., followed by the Mass of Christian Burial on June 6, 1987 at St. Joseph's Church at 10:30 a.m.

Interment was in St. Joseph's Cemetery, Wayland.

Monsignor Ratigan is survived by a sister, Mrs. Theodore (Rosemary) McCann of Rochester.

Francis Medical Center in Peoria.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated in Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Galesburg on Wednesday, May 20. Bishop Edward O'Rourke was celebrant of the Mass, which was concelebrated by Fathers Cornelius J. Hollerick and James Morrissey.

Interment was in St. Mary's Cemetery in Monmouth, Illinois.

Monsignor Prendergast is survived by a brother, George Prendergast, of Venice, Florida; and two sisters, Madeline Flynn, Rochester; and Jean Zehder, North Fort Myers, Florida.