

Loving the Mystery

Three seems to be a significant number to humans. We have three blind mice, three little pigs, the three stooges, the three monkeys, and the Three Musketeers to name a few. We also have several rules of three in aviation, scuba diving, computer programming, economics, politics, and the list goes on. Celebrities die in threes and the third times the charm. In writing there is the rule that suggests that a trio of events or characters is more humorous, satisfying, or effective than other numbers.¹ There are negative threes such as three strikes in baseball and two's company three's a crowd.

Perhaps it is not surprising that when we think about God we think in terms of three manifestations of God or as theologians like to say the three persons of God. But that creates the problem of trying to explain one God in three persons. Indeed, nearly all analogies that we have heard are considered heresies. For example, saying the Trinity is like water which can be experienced as solid, liquid and gas is the heresy of modalism. Another attempt is to say that God is like a star that puts off heat and light. That is considered Arianism the heresy that the Son and Spirit are creations of the Father and therefore not coequal. We might think that saying God is like a clover leaf would get us closer but that is the heresy of partialism. That is that the three are not distinct persons but one third of the Divine.² As you can see trying to define the Trinity is a perilous task. That said, I would argue strenuously that it is neither a pointless or useless concept.

The Trinity like so much about Christianity is a mystery. This is not the Agatha Christie kind of mystery where the purpose is to figure out whodunit. Not having an answer may make us uncomfortable, but the mystery can be the answer in itself. The mystery may be a call into engagement. Rather than throwing out the concept or throwing our hands up in the air and giving up we can engage with the mystery and let it work on us.

Pondering the mystery of the Trinity invites us into any number of powerful ways of thinking and being. For example there is the Anglican concept of the three legged stool. In this concept the legs of the stool are scripture, reason, and tradition (another trinity). In this concept we do not read scripture in a vacuum nor do we take it literally. Rather we engage scripture using our God-given ability to think. We then examine our conclusions through the traditions of the Church. For example, we might think we have come up with a clever way to describe the Trinity only to learn that it is something thinkers through the ages have condemned as a heresy.

Living our faith life using this doctrine of scripture, reason, and tradition allows us to ponder something seemingly opaque in such a way that there is clarity. That is, instead of a looking at an ethical issue and feeling as if we are

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_three_\(writing\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_three_(writing)) accessed May 29, 2021

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQLfgaUoQCw> Donall and Conall talk the Trinity with St. Patrick

looking into a kaleidoscope, we are able to apply these three concepts like filters that sort out the colors and help us make sense of what we are seeing.

Indeed, I think that the Trinity is a gift that is to be pondered, lived, and loved. We do not have to solve the mystery of the Divine Trinity to know that God created us in the image of the holy. Not because the Bible tells us so but because we can experience it in our hearts, our relationships, and in our worship.

We do not have to solve the mystery to know that we are loved by God in all the holy persons in which God exists. Our personal encounters with the Divine are enough. The personal encounter does not have to be like a lightning strike. It could be as mundane as seeing nature through these windows. It could be as everyday as the touch of a hand or the look from our beloved. It could be as commonplace as being moved by music, a poem, or a painting.

Ultimately as we ponder the Trinity we discover that the rationality of the concept no longer matters. It is the experience of the Divine one to whom we pray, with whom we walk, and who lives deep within us that matters. The mystery of the Trinity becomes something that we love with all of our heart and being, because we experience the love of the Triune God in all those everyday ways and so much more.

Living the mystery is the thing. As Rainer Maria Rilke wrote:

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves.... Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”