

## Homily for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity Year C

By Fr Steele Hartmann OCSO

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. It is a feast on which we celebrate God, as we Christians understand our God. It can seem merely a theological feast designed to remind ourselves of a difficult dogma central to our faith, which can be simply put as: *One God in Three Persons*. That is the only simple part about it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is rather intellectually challenging. But it is useful to remember that doctrine follows experience, and that behind the doctrine of the Trinity lies the Christian experience of our God. Today's feast is given us to celebrate, and not just to theologians, and so perhaps it is better for us to look behind the doctrine to the experience.

When Saint Paul speaks of his experience of God, he speaks of "when God was pleased to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the Gentiles." (Galatians 1:16) The experience, then, is not some private indulgence, but for a purpose. So Paul describes himself as Christ's servant (Galatians 1:10), as an apostle (Galatians 1:1), which means one who is sent. His understanding of the experience is in terms of 'Son', which fits his experience of being sent. For Christ, who is the Son, said of himself: "I have come to do the will of the one who sent me." (John 4:34; 5:30)

St John, in the Prologue to his Gospel, reminds us that "No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest the Father's heart, who has made him known." (John 1:18) So the experience of Son is a revelation of God, or better, the experience of one doing the will of God is a revelation of God. So Jesus, the one who does the will of the one who sent him, says to us: "To have seen me is to have seen the Father." (John 14:9) In the Gospels the Jews reject Jesus because he claims to be God's Son. He says to them, "The works my Father has given me to carry out, these same works of mine testify that the Father has sent me. ... believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason." (John 5:36; 14:11) It is the doing of God's will that reveals the Son in whom the Father is made known. Our experience of God, then, comes in terms of knowing God's will and doing it, and it is the doing that makes God known. This we are all sent to do; we are all called to be apostles. (John 17:6-8; 20:21) Our quest, then, is at heart a quest to know God's will and to do it. Doing this we will make God known.

It was St Paul's experience that "to will good works is present in me, but to do them is not. I do not do the good I want to do, but I do the evil I do not want." (Romans 7:18-19) If we are honest, this is our experience, too. As Jesus said to the Jews who refused him, so he says to us as we are: "But you, you put into action the

lessons learned from your father. ... The devil is your father, and you prefer to do what your father wants." (John 8:38,44) A son reveals who his father is, in what he does; it is the doing which reveals. Left to ourselves, we have an impossible task to perform, for in our doing we cannot hope to reveal God. Along with Mary, we can only say to God, "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34) And his answer is the same, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. ... for nothing is impossible to God." (Luke 1:35, 37) Like Mary, ours is to believe and step out in faith, and not to be put off by our present seeming inability. (See also Romans 4:18-22; 8:24-25)

This Mary says to us, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5) In St John's Gospel, Jesus says to us, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you." (John 14:26) In this light, we can see **that we have** the Gospels, and Scripture more broadly, is itself the work of the Holy Spirit, and that is why we hold them sacred: they tell what Jesus said to us, they tell us of God's Word to us. This Jesus said to us while he was still with us, "I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of Truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking as from himself but will say only what he has learnt. ... All that he tells you will be taken from what is mine." This Holy Spirit does not reveal anything new to us, but will reveal to us the something more that is already there in what Jesus, God's Word, says to us. This Jesus speaks to us in parables; it is not always immediately clear what he is really saying to us. He merely says to us: "Listen anyone who has ears." (e.g. Matthew 11:15) We who seek to know God's will and do it must, then, start by listening: before we can be apostles, we must first be disciples. That is why for us monks, *Lectio Divina* — that slow, meditative reading of Scripture — is our principal form of prayer. For in so doing we allow the Holy Spirit to whisper in our ear, so to speak, and reveal to us what Jesus is saying. (c.f. Galatians 1:11-12) In this we imitate Mary, Christ's first disciple, of whom it is said: "As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2:19, 51) And she did this especially when she did not understand: How can this be? (Luke 2:50)

Over time, in this process of patient listening, the Word slowly begins to take flesh in us (John 1:14) and becomes flesh of our flesh (Genesis 2:23), and we begin to do what he tells us: we embody the Word, if you like. When we find that we do start to keep his word (John 14:23), 'without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue', then we must know that the Holy Spirit has indeed come upon us. (Rule of St Benedict 7:67-70) For we know what we can do, and that this can be none of our doing — along with Mary, we can only praise God: "My soul glorifies the Lord ... for the Almighty has done great things for me." (Rule of St Benedict Prologue: 29-32;

Luke 1:46ff) In this experience of doing God's will (John 16:14-15; 14:23), under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we will reveal who our Father is — and indeed know who our Father is, for this Spirit will have us cry out: "Abba/Father!" (Romans 8:15) When this Spirit comes upon us, like Jesus, in our doing we will experience our God as Father and ourselves as Son/Daughter — brothers/sisters and co-heirs with Christ. (Mark 1:10-11; Romans 8:29) In our doing his will, we will reveal the God who is our Father by showing ourselves as Son/Daughter — then we shall do what we were sent to do; then we shall be what we were made to be: images of God in this world, and we shall be able to say along with Jesus, "To have seen me is to have seen the Father." (John 17:6; Genesis 1:26-27; John 14:9)

The will of the Father being done is the Son; what enables is the Holy Spirit. This is the Christian experience of God. This we celebrate today. Christ has sent his Holy Spirit upon us all: we can all aspire to this experience! In so doing we will be taken into the Trinity as sisters and brothers of the Son. As St Paul puts it: 'For this hope we are saved.' (Romans 8:24) But first we must Listen. (Rule of St Benedict Prologue 1:1)

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  - It can seem merely a theological feast designed to remind ourselves of a difficult dogma central to our faith, which can be simply put as: *One God in Three Persons*.
  - That is the only simple part about it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is rather intellectually challenging.
  - + But it is useful to remember that doctrine follows experience, and that behind the doctrine of the Trinity lies the Christian experience of our God. => Today's feast is given us to celebrate, and not just to theologians, and so perhaps it is better for us to look behind the doctrine to the experience.

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  - = The experience, then, is not some private indulgence, but for a purpose. => So Paul describes himself as Christ's servant (Galatians 1:10), as an apostle (Galatians 1:1), which means one who is sent. - His understanding of the experience is in terms of 'Son', which fits his experience of being sent.
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  - In the Gospels the Jews reject Jesus because he claims to be God's Son. He says to them, "The works my Father has given me to carry out, these same works of mine testify that the Father has sent me. ... believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason." (John 5:36; 14:11)
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