

Trinity Sunday 2017

Mend your ways, encourage one another, and peace will be with you.

“Find the real world, give it endlessly away, and grow rich flinging gold to all who ask. I’ll dance there with you cheek to cheek.”

History

The word, “Trinity,” was first used by Tertullian in 170 AD. In the Council of Nicaea in 325 which was trying to define this dogma, the priest, Arius, got up to speak and Nicholas of Myra punched him in the nose. In the Council of Chalcedon in 589, mobs of people took to the streets in Rome to demonstrate for their favorite formulation of the doctrine, which eventually led to the split between Eastern and Western Christianity in 1054. The earliest description of Trinity by the early church Fathers in the 5th and 6th centuries was “dancing,” not dancers - but dancing. We are made for this Dance; no one is left out.

Trinity is the Universal Dance

What is Trinity Dancing, and how does it go? It’s the moving through the ups-and-downs, the backwards-and-forwards, the ins-and-outs of whatever comes our way in life. There is a presence that moves through all of this that sustains us and keeps us going. The Dance is smooth at times, and at other times it is wild - and it just keeps going. Stubbing our toes, tripping over each other’s feet, falling and getting back up again is the Trinity Dance.

Scientists describe the movement of the entire cosmos in the same way: planets, stars, and galaxies all moving around each other, each influencing each other, being influenced by each other, and the constantly moving relationship among them. The same can be said of people, animals - even vegetative life. Just watch them. The dynamic in the material world is the same as it is for the spiritual. The religious word for it is “Trinity.”

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Sometimes Eternal Dancing is Fun

“You that love lovers, this is your home. Welcome! Watch the dust grains moving in the light near the window. Their dance is our dance. We rarely hear the inward music, but we’re dancing to it nevertheless, directed by the one who teaches us, the pure joy of the sun, our music master. When I am with you, we stay up all night. When you’re not here, I can’t sleep. The minute I heard my first love story I started looking for you, not knowing how blind that was. Lovers don’t finally meet somewhere. They’re in each other all along.”

Sometimes Eternal Dancing is Sad

My cousin in Mt. Angel, Benedictine Sr. Marilyn Schwab was seriously ill with leukemia for a considerable period time until she died in 1987. Towards the end, she wrote me, *“I’m so sick I don’t feel like praying. What does it mean to pray?”* Sr. Marilyn and I were close, and yet as close as we were, I didn’t go down to see her much during her illness, including at the end. My cousin, Fr. Elwin, did and from a greater distance. She wrote in her journal how supportive she found him. I was working in Portland at the time, only an hour away, and didn’t go down. That hit me hard. I can’t change it. But something helped me forgive myself and accept the fact that I didn’t reach out to her like I wish I had. This is still in me. My part in that dance wasn’t pretty, but with God leading, I didn’t quit. Sad times require furious dancing. She and I are still dancing with each other - cheek to cheek. .

Sometimes Eternal Dancing is Hopeful

This past Friday night, some of us from here and the Nazarene Church went out to South Fork Camp east of Tillamook. It is a minimum security prison housing inmates convicted of drug-related crime. The program we bring out is a Christian-oriented recovery program, based on the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. At the end of the evening, we always circle up and share our struggles and hopes.

One of the inmates, I’ll call him Joe, shared his story: alcoholic parents, got addicted himself as a kid, wife and kids left him, his teen age son wouldn’t talk to him, and he faced the prospect of losing contact with them when he was released, which was soon. During all that time, he kept writing cards to his son saying he was sorry and that he loved him. He said he didn’t write him letters, because there’s not that much to talk about in prison.

Unexpectedly the judge, seeing the progress Joe had made while being incarcerated, awarded him back to his family. His wife lobbied for him, and his son finally called him. We could see in his face how life had changed for him. I thanked him for sharing his story with us and could see why I came out to camp that night.

Why is this Doctrine named Trinity central to our Christian faith?

Because it tells us that our God is not distant, off somewhere whose attention we need to catch and whose concern we need to earn. Our prayers reflect this: *“Lord, come down and save me; -- Forsake me not, O Lord my God; be not far from me -- O Lord, when I call, answer me...”* and the like.

These prayers are beautiful, they give expression to our needs. It's just that we don't want to think God doesn't notice us if we don't call out our needs, that we have to pass some kind of muster “before” we are included in the Dance.

The Dance

Our Dancing God is right here in the midst of us, in the midst of all our struggles, joys and caring. Even better, we are in the midst of God dancing with us through our struggles, joys and caring. The more this seeps into us, the more we marinate in this, the less will we be brought down by the deceits and snares of our country, of our church, and especially of ourselves, and we will find ourselves, like Francis of Assisi, being people of deep and abiding joy.

Whatever happens, that is our dance. It's not important whether or not our dance is beautiful; what is important is that our dance is faithful. Our dance with God is not about performance, it is about union - warts and all.

*“Find the real world, give it endlessly away, and grow rich flinging gold to all who ask,
I'll dance there with you cheek to cheek.”*

**Trinity is the name for the energy that moves the universe around.
Moving along with her keeps us nimble on our feet.**

Happy Trinity Feast Day!