

# Living the Trinity

John 16:12-15

## Introduction

“What is most personal is most universal.”

So said the late Henri Nouwen. He was born in Holland in 1932 and became a Catholic priest. But Nouwen didn't want to take the path of the Jesuits, saying that this would mean he had to study too much.



Instead, after seminary and ordination he studied and went on to teach psychology. Yet, Henri Nouwen is not remembered so much for what he was thinking about God, but more for how he lived for God.

He authored 39 wonderful books (e.g. *The wounded healer*), but it was his pastoral care and advocacy for the poor, for people with intellectual disabilities and for the politically marginalized that stands out.

He wrote, “By giving words to these intimate experiences I can make my life available to others.”

Nouwen's testimony follows in the footsteps of his Saviour, Jesus. In our reading from the Gospel of John today Jesus tells his close band of followers that he is making God's living presence available to them, and to all.

‘(Jesus said)...When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you’ (John 16:12-15)

## Living, not just thinking The Trinity

My aim today, in this final sermon of the series, *Trinity - love that never ends*, is to make sure we are living the Trinity, not just thinking about God as Triune...

We've seen that there is one God in community, who is three divine persons of the same essence, the same power, and the same eternity.

Even in this passage of the Gospel, we see an incipient trinitarian relationship between the Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit as revealed through Jesus. But so what!

It *is* important to study this truth. As St Augustine of Hippo once said,

“If you deny the Holy Trinity you lose your soul; if you try to explain it lose your mind.”

That same Augustine, born in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD, was bishop in a region we now call Algeria.

The story goes that one day while wrestling with the Scriptures about the nature of God, he decided to take a break and go for a walk on the beach. There he saw a little boy digging a hole in the sand with a seashell. The boy then ran off to the ocean, filling the shell, and rushed back to pour it into the hole he had made.



“What are you doing, my little man,” Augustine asked. “I’m trying to put the ocean into this hole”, replied the boy.

It dawned on Augustine that this was precisely what he had been trying to do in his writings about God...to fit the great mysteries of God into his limited mind. Augustine ended up writing 15 volumes on God the Holy Trinity alone!

It's humbling to remember, as one old hymn I sang as a child puts it, that God is “ineffably sublime” – that is, wonderfully beyond our description.

And yet, the Gospel of Jesus tells us that God has made what is unknowable, known, not exhaustively, yet in a way that the Bible refers to as “fullness”.

For example, the Apostle Paul declared,

“... in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col. 2:9)

And John's Gospel tells us...

“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16)

So, this pursuit of the mind has been important. Thinking about God as Trinity does matter.

Perhaps Martin Luther of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century helps us here, saying...“The Trinity does not explain the nature of God, but our relationship with God.

It's vital that what we've been thinking becomes what we are living.

### **Living with Trinitarian view of God**

Perhaps you're a person who grew up with or became a Christian among people who emphasized God the Father in their worship.

This was true of my early years, attending Sunday church where Jesus was rarely mentioned, except in formal readings and prayers, and the Spirit never spoken of except on Pentecost Sunday. Mostly God was referred to as “Almighty” or “Heavenly Father” or the like.

The good things of that worship in a church of “God the Father” included:

- An emphasis on awe and wonder at the majesty of God
- Regard for order and stability and right judgment about things
- Respect for those who do good, and
- Thankfulness for all blessings enjoyed in life.

Perhaps, alternatively, you're someone who grew up with, or became a Christian with people who emphasized following Jesus daily – let's call it a “church of God the Son”.

In my teens I joined the Scripture Union movement and became an activist for Jesus. In fact, in those days you hardly did anything without mentioning Jesus, praising Jesus, wearing a T-shirt of Jesus, or learning more about Jesus from the Gospels.

Good things I learned in that “church” of God the Son included...

- The importance and centrality of the Bible as the Word of God
- the Gospel as Good News to all the world,
- the fragility of humans and the need for divine forgiveness,
- the church as a band of brothers and sisters made from misfits and strangers,
- the need to act on injustice and to see the world changed for God.

Then, from my mid-twenties, I was with a church that emphasized God the Holy Spirit in its words, its actions, and its worship.

Here I was challenged by many new things, including...

- an expectation that God gives strength, faith and guidance daily
- grace to grow in personal character and love for others
- a readiness to change course when the status quo doesn't cut it, and
- an appreciation of the diversity of God's people and their gifts

The unity and diversity I experienced is promised in our reading from 1 Corinthians 12 today. Paul writes...

‘Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone’ (1 Cor. 12:4-6)

Some Christians like to obsess over the list of gifts that follows, and yet it's clear that the list was neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. Yet see how the community of Christians reflects the unity and diversity in God. There's an incipient Trinitarian shape to the text. The one who is "another helper" like Jesus, is "the same Spirit", "same Lord", "same God".

Such great inclusiveness and diversity can be found in God's church when God's Spirit is welcome to be at work.

## Conclusion

I wonder if you relate more to one more than the other of the three churches I mentioned. Has your journey of knowing God been predominantly in the camp of God the Father? Of God the Son? Of God the Spirit?

As we saw in the words of Jesus, God has come to us in person, and has shared with us the life-giving Spirit we need to grow in knowledge, in love and in service.

Let's be sure we keep on learning how to live the Holy Trinity – that is to worship God with all our lives – as Paul puts it in Romans 12:

[in the light of the Gospel] ...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, for this is your spiritual worship.

Author Aimee Byrd says, "...there is no plateau in the Christian life, we are either growing closer to Christ's likeness or we are falling away."

Let's give our energy to the worship of God in our daily living, just as God has given mercy and life to us. That's the only appropriate response!

Let me close this series with a quote from Latin American theologian, Justo Gonzalez, who says,

"[The Holy] Trinity is a mystery, not a puzzle. Love is a mystery, a crossword is a puzzle. You try to solve the puzzle, you stand in awe before a mystery." Justo Gonzalez