

Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity Shows us the Path of Love

I'm one of the most opinionated people I know. From sports, to politics, to food, to music, I have an opinion on everything. And I'm very firm in these opinions too. As flexible as I got was once ordering a medium well steak. Now I'm pretty much back to well. With a side of ketchup of course.

For the most part, I've never encountered too many problems with people because of my opinions. But at the same time, like many, I've had challenging people too to deal with. Every priest has had someone really dislike a homily. Most all clergy have had people really dislike them too for this or that reason and people end up leaving the parish, or a staff person quits, or a person writes to the bishop about their priest. And on social media, I've had to block people who got too political, or deal with mean-spirited comments every so often. But I never fear speaking my mind. And I hope others would listen to me even if they disagree with me.

We live in polarizing times. On the one hand, I get why we can be opinionated. But on the other I think back to being a kid and my dad once saying "why do you get so upset when the Vikings lose? You'll still have to go to school tomorrow and it's not that big of a deal." His point was of course don't get so wound up over sports. But I'd say the same thing over politics, and yes, even religion (more on that below, I'm not suggesting don't take your faith seriously!).

For some, those differences of opinion can boil over. Last week for instance we saw anarchists and rioters; people who I really don't think had an opinion on much of anything other than wanting to cause mayhem. When you set fire to something and destroy property, your actions speak for themselves. More common though is the "boiling over" of things that lead to yelling or especially "trolling" online of people or simply making snide comments rather than having a discussion or argument.

This situation we deal with of polarization sadly isn't anything new. Talk to folks who went through the Vietnam War, or Civil Rights moment. Go back a little further and talk to a Catholic in America in the early days of our country and see how they were treated. Or look at the violence that has broken out between Christians of different sects, and Muslims of different sects over the centuries. Division can often run amok and lead to so much hate. This isn't to say we don't hold firm to what we believe in; you won't get me to change my politics. Or my steak preparation. But we also take a page from the Trinity in how to live.

This week is Trinity Sunday; we celebrate the Father, Son and Spirit and the dogma of the Trinity. Really what it comes down to is we believe in one God, but in three distinct persons, each with their own unique mission, each having unique traits, but also being united in love.

This is the starting point when it comes to division. As I said last week, we need to start with what unites us, and what unites us is that we are all sons and daughters of the

same, loving God. Once we start with the humanity, before we get into the labels or things that make someone unique, we are better prepared to treat that person with love.

Living that out requires different things though.

For one, it requires listening. Listening is hard work. We see someone who thinks differently, or believes differently, or says something online, and we can sometimes want to go in and get our point across quickly, because we of course are right and they are wrong. We may be right. But we need to know why do they believe as they do. We may learn more about their background, or what caused them to take a course of action. Even when we see criminals, I'm struck by people who are involved in prison ministry where they talk to those who are incarcerated and hear their story. They have so much to teach us about human relations; many see just a criminal, they see a human first. Listening does not mean ignoring poor moral choices. But it does mean get an idea of what it's like to walk in another person's shoes.

This leads to patience. Now there are things that I'm really firm about as I said. For instance, back to religion. It shouldn't shock you religion is important to me. And it shouldn't shock you that I believe there is a uniqueness with the Catholic faith; last week was the birthday of the Church on Pentecost, and Christ created one Church, not many of them. My hope is to bring people into this Church as an ambassador of the Church. But I also can't go in and just expect people to change instantly. I need to listen to them. And I need to be patient. This is why I mentioned that we shouldn't lose our temper when a person rejects our viewpoints or even our religion. Maybe you know someone who hates the Catholic faith; or more likely, someone who is indifferent. Well just as a 12 year old maybe needed to let a Vikings loss go more, we also need to accept sometimes we lose the battle but we can win the war, because God is with us and working through us to help others. Saint Charles de Foucauld in French Algeria was there alone to try to convert Muslims. He didn't gain any converts, but he did gain their respect, and said once that maybe it was his job to till the garden at this point even if he couldn't see the growth. God is patient with us, and when we are patient such good things can happen over time. So don't worry if someone isn't on the same page yet as you with something that you know to be true spiritually or morally. Just give up on them.

Forgiveness and letting go are also a big part of this too. Between humans, there are so many things that people have a hard time letting go of, especially in families. We have to ask ourselves though is it worth it? Even if the person hasn't reached out to us, if we harbor resentment what good does it do? Or if we refuse to want to reconcile or reach out, is it worth it to just brood over something? Forgiveness isn't easy, and we should not just ignore someone wronging us or sweep everything under the rug. We have to acknowledge if we have been hurt, and in some cases we can't have a relationship with someone. But often we might find that reaching out for reconciliation, or even just starting by praying for those who have wronged us, can ultimately lead to a much better place of us and the other person.

It's a good thing to have differences. And we should not be afraid to argue or disagree. It's also good to be passionate about things. But as we all know, sometimes this can lead to so much senseless and needless pain. And hopefully we also know that when we strive to come together, to listen and reach out, to forgive and reconcile, and most importantly of all to see someone first of all as a human being created in God's image, a much better world will result. We are many parts, but all one body - let us work together to build one another up rather than tear one another down.

God bless and have a great week,

Fr. Paul