

Just want you to know that the police have confirmed that the man who fell from the roof of an 18th floor nightclub was not a bouncer.

OPERATOR: 911, what's your emergency?

MAN: A guy just got hit by a car; we need an ambulance immediately!

OPERATOR: What's your location?

MAN: I'm on Eucalyptus Street

OPERATOR: Can you spell that for me?

There is a long, awkward pause; the operator hears the man breathing heavily.

OPERATOR: Sir, are you still there?

MAN: Yeah, I dragged him over to PINE Street. P-I-N-E.

OK, the mystery of the Trinity. Here's the deal. The God of our understanding is just that: The God of our understanding. What we need is the God beyond our understanding. Which brings us into the MYSTERY of God. A God our brains and buildings can fully hold just isn't big enough to be truly God. Think about this. We could never possibly grasp the WHO, WHAT, HOW, and WHY of everything that is or ever was or ever might be! And God is bigger than all of it! If we can fully fathom it, it ceases to be worthy of our reverence; if we can fathom it – it is NOT God.

In writing to his church 2000 years ago and to those who would follow them in this journey, the apostle Paul composed a prayer that as people of faith we might "grasp fully the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God Himself." (Eph 3:18-19) This is both a beautiful aspiration and an impossible task. If there is no mystery left in our belief system, we need to move into a space that will accommodate it. No matter how fervently we've prayed, how earnestly we've searched, how diligently we've studied, or how sure of ourselves we currently are – we're either partially or substantially wrong. Whatever God is made of, we don't have the capacity to capture it completely in the minds we're equipped with. No religious tradition, no specific denomination, no creed, and certainly no single human being can fit it.

It's not easy for us to admit this, probably because most of us have been raised with CERTAINTY as a virtue and DOUBT as, well, NOT virtue! We've been conditioned not only to believe, but to do so without hesitation or reservation or alteration – but that was never really the plan or the expectation. Jesus was surrounded by people who couldn't banish disbelief even with Him close enough to touch, human beings who struggled to love people well even with the tangible example in front of them. So we need to give ourselves a break for struggling with 2000 years between us. (adapted from John Pavlovitz. IF GOD IS LOVE, DON'T BE A JERK, p. 16-17) Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wisely observed, "We are closer to God when we are asking questions than when we think we have the answers." Good advice. Ask questions. Don't fight about answers.

So that was my first point, we're dealing with mystery – always. Second, so why then try to speak of God at all? Karl Rahner gives us the answer: "The content of Christianity is that the unknowable, absolute

Mystery bestows itself in forgiveness and draws us into its own divine nature.” God CALLS US into Him/Herself.

And all other doctrines of our faith are extensions, explanations, amplifications and descriptions of this one Mystery of the Trinity.

And when we forget that central reality, the very mystery we call God, then we tend to get lost in the details of doctrine, and we waste our energy that should be spent on loving – arguing about who is right and who is wrong. As Rahner warns, “Don’t think of so many complex things. Give the deeper human realities time to surface: love, silence, fear, truth. Face these ultimate experiences. Don’t make theories about them, but simply live them. Then, some primitive experience of God can emerge.”

All human experience is at root an experience of Mystery, of God, whether or not we acknowledge it. When we love another person, we realize that both of us are embraced within a greater love. We hear a symphony and are transported into the realm of beauty. Every human experience urges us into that vast, mysterious, unspeakable atmosphere that we can neither define nor deny.

We try to describe what the Mystery we call God has to do with us and our world. So, the church, trying to help us negotiate this divine realm within our very mundane daily lives, has refined the One Mystery into the lesser mysteries of creation, redemption, grace and sacraments.

Our DOCTRINE OF CREATION, for instance, wrestles with the link between time and eternity, the puzzle of something coming from nothing, the ongoing relationship with God, the problem of evil in a good world. All interesting, but creation is essentially what happens when Mystery goes out of itself and draws all things back to itself.

REDEMPTION was originally a legal process whereby a family bought back a member from slavery. It was taken over by Christian doctrine as one description of how we are reconciled with God. Redemption looks at the need for salvation, rejects the concept of a vengeful God, teaches the value of sacrifice, and shows us the possibility of one person dying for another. All fascinating ideas, but the essential reality of redemption is that Mystery comes to us in forgiveness and draws us back into its own divine life.

The DOCTRINE OF GRACE tries to explain how an eternal God connects with time-bound people, how an infinite God relates with finite creatures, how mere mortals could deal with divine Mystery. Grace was conceived as the bridge between God and us. Grace is essentially the Great Mystery giving itself to us, and lovingly drawing us into its own divine life.

OUR SACRAMENTAL UNDERSTANDING OF OUR WORLD reminds that our union with God is an ongoing thing, as love between people always is. And that union touches repeatedly in life in different ways. So the church identifies special events and describes the unique grace in each case – which we call the 7 sacraments. The sacraments remind us that God is IN everything – our bathing – baptism, our inspirations – Confirmation – our eating – The Eucharist – our illnesses and our dyings – Anointing of the Sick – our failures in relationship – Confession – and in our big life commitments – Marriage and Priesthood. All remind us that the grace of conversion, the grace of prayer, the grace of every moment – are all part of the One Great Trinitarian Mystery coming to us and drawing us into its own life.

We cannot grasp this Mystery; the Mystery grasps us. (adapted from Fr. James Smith, PREACHING RESOURCES, 4th Sunday of Easter, May 2011, p. 4) And for goodness sake, we need to have a sense of humor about this. We’re like slugs trying to understand humans when we are humans trying to understand God!

“This is not claimed as original material; it is the fruit of years of reading and research, collated by volunteers, but not always correctly footnoted, or not footnoted at all. It was created solely for the purpose of an oral proclamation in the context of the liturgy of the church. Every effort has been made to provide the necessary attribution to the authors of the sources.”

Meister Eckhart taught the simple power of letting go and letting be. To let go is no easy task. But in any loving relationship, as we see in the Trinity, such a surrendering of unneeded boundaries is the source of joy. Eckhart puts it this way:

....the Father laughs/ and gives birth to the Son. / The Son laughs back at the Father/

And gives birth to the Spirit./ The whole Trinity laughs/ and gives birth to us.

Matthew Fox writes that “laughter may well be the ultimate act of letting go and letting be: the music of the divine cosmos. For in the core of the Trinity laughing and birthing go on all day long.” For Eckhart, heaven is now. We are invited to participate in the eternal flow of Trinity here, in this lifetime. The only thing keeping us from God and heaven is the ultimate and damning lie that we have ever been separate from God. He is always WITH US. I love that image – a laughing God as the essence of the Trinity! Certainly tells us to get over ourselves and let God run the universe. (freely adapted from Richard Rohr, CAC Daily Meditation, September 2017)

And third, how we mirror this Trinitarian Mystery in our lives. The Trinity names God as Father, Son and Spirit, which give us a mandate to bring the experience of God as Father/Mother-Parent, Brother-Sibling, and Spirit, to all the world. Theologian John F. X. Harriott has suggested that this mission is to be inspired by our belief that human beings are made in God’s image. That image in its triune dimension should be reflected in our way of life.

Opportunities for imagining God as Father/Mother lie in our efforts at generation, creation and maintenance. All we do to awaken, support and cherish life....all we do to design and build, to grow and nurture and manufacture....every kind of art and technology reflects our likeness to God, our Parent/Father/Mother and Creator.

Similarly, every act of healing, every outreach of forgiveness, every sacrifice of self for the sake of the other and every embrace of the unwashed and the unwanted, every word of truth spoken fearlessly against injustice, hypocrisy, greed and violence – all these actions witness to our likeness to God, the Son and our Brother.

Our likeness to the Spirit is shown in every burst of inspiration and imagination, every expression of art and music and beauty, in every advance in knowledge and wisdom, in every invention and innovation, as well as in every word and work of love.

Because the God whose varied images we reflect does not remain distant but chooses to be near, the feast of the Trinity is not only a feast of God; it is ours, as well. For it is you and it is me with whom God chooses to be involved and invested. It is in you and in me that God chooses to dwell. In love, you and I are scooped up into that embrace that has given us life and purpose and meaning. We don’t want to miss embracing this mystery by overanalyzing it. We simply need to appreciate and emulate and extend the embrace so that others may also know and experience the divine three-in-one, for us, with us and within us. For the sake of the world. Amen. (adapted from PREACHING RESOURCES, MOST HOLY TRINITY, June 2009, p. 1-2)