

I speak to you in the name of the One, Holy and Undivided Trinity. AMEN

OPENING

Jack Nicholson's character in *A Few Good Men*, famously shouted at Tom Cruise's: "You can't handle the truth!"

Jesus is doing that here, in a much much nicer way, trying to say goodbye, trying to explain this thing called the Trinity.

Our Gospel reading has just 3 short verses, but they pulsate with this life and electricity that still conducts across these 2000 years.

In it, Jesus is saying goodbye, saying all these really heady things, that don't quite make sense and that are way beyond what the disciples can understand.

Jesus does not say "Here is the Doctrine of the Trinity"; instead he speaks to them in the only way possible, for someone in his position, admitting that he cannot say everything, but says this is what I can tell you now.

The recorded reaction of the disciples is confusion and more questions, but you also have to think that there was some humor too in their reaction to what Jesus was saying.

Peter Kreeft, the Catholic philosopher, says this about heaven: "You have to think that, in heaven, all the philosophers are Greek, all the cooks are French, and all the lovers are Italian. And ALL the comedians are Jewish."¹

The disciples, I think, used their sense of humor, their understanding of the gap between perception and reality to carry them through those dangerous and confusing time.

And so should we!

Jesus says: "I cannot really explain everything to you, you are really struggling with what I have already said so this is good for now."

But slowly but surely, the Church tried to understand who the Person of Jesus Christ was in the relationship with God the Father, and with God the Holy Spirit. They came up with the "TRINITY."

¹ http://www.peterkreeft.com/audio/13_lost-in-the-cosmos/peter-kreeft_lost-in-the-cosmos_.mp3

TRINITY:

I heard this somewhere, that if someone were to ask you to “explain the Trinity”—start with the idea that it’s a concept that’s packed into a suitcase.

When you are travelling you pack everything you need, your clothes and your phone charger and your medications, it’s very tightly wrapped and it’s unrecognizable in that form.

It looks bizarre, it has no purpose.

A suitcase is just this dense, oblong object that’s heavy and hard to bear.

But, in reality, from experience, particularly if your luggage gets rerouted to the wrong destination or you accidentally packed something away that you need during a long flight, you really need that suitcase... actually you are naked without it.

It's usefulness comes about only as you unpack the suitcase, you have to explain it and unroll it.

You have to tell the story of why you packed this and why you put that there.

You have to tell the story of the Trinity, of one God in three persons (Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer).

Of their relationship, of their synchronized laughter. Of how they interrelate with one another, and the difference they make in your life.

Otherwise it’s just a bunch of stuff crammed into a big word TRINITY.

But, as a reality unfolded and explained, it clothes us and helps us to live our lives.²

SHIFT

Telling the story, going slow, using humor.

God the Father laughed, and the Son was Born.

Then the two of them laughed, and the Spirit was Born.

When all three of them laughed together, the human being was born.

So said Meister Eckhart, the 14th century mystic. For him, the “mystery of the Trinity was surrounded by peals of golden laughter at the heart of the universe.”³

In Scripture, we know about laughter from the story of Abraham and Sarah.

Husband and wife were advanced in age but an angel visited Abraham and Sarah and said they were going to have a son.

² [N.T. Wright "Life's Biggest Questions" 3/26/2019](#)

³ Carole E. Crumley. “Pastoral Perspective.” *Feasting on the Word*. Year A. Trinity Sunday. Pg. 30.

Sarah was in the other room and she laughed at that. The angel called her on it, Sarah denied it saying “I did not laugh” because she was afraid. The angel said “oh yes you did laugh.”⁴

Abraham and Sarah would name their Son “Isaac” which, of course, means laughter.

Sarah had been afraid, I think, not just because she was caught in a lie, she was really afraid for what the angel’s message meant, what it would mean to be a mother at that age, what it would mean if God’s Dream would finally manifest itself in her and Abraham’s relationship. That’s scary, that’s hard to understand.

How could she face it all? One response was to laugh.

HUMOR:

How do you respond to life’s greatest mysteries?

You laugh, not a haughty laugh, but a deep sigh about life’s challenges and gifts.

The Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft said there are three ways of looking at humor. The first two are preferred by modernity:

The 1st is the Darwinian approach where laughter is a biological response, a physiological stimulus similar to what hyenas experience, think *The Lion King*. The 2nd is the Marxist angle: where humor is the snide, snark attempt by the underclass to satirize the upper class, or vice versa.

Finally, there is the 3rd way of looking at humor, the Classical way, which Kreeft prefers, where laughter comes about based upon the difference between perception and reality, that’s called irony.⁵

So.... Perception: Abraham and Sarah are old, they will never have children.
Reality: your life is about to change.

Perception: the tomb is empty, “my Lord is Gone.”⁶

Reality: there is someone walking around outside, it must be the gardener.
That’s funny.

⁴ Genesis 18.1-15

⁵ http://www.peterkreeft.com/audio/13_lost-in-the-cosmos/peter-kreeft_lost-in-the-cosmos_.mp3

⁶ John 20.13

The gap between those is irony, it's where the humor lies. And that's where Scripture so often communicates to us, where God communicates to us through "golden laughter at the heart of the universe."

Now the "Trinity" ... it's really that not funny
But I am with Meister Eckhart by suggesting that this doctrine is a reminder that God, in whatever way we understand God, is always more surprising, more hopeful, more joyful than we could imagine.

I think we actually get a glimpse of Jesus' difficulty, of what it's like to try to explain something to someone but you cannot really say everything.

As parents, there are so many moments where you are trying to explain to a child about this difficult issue, or this thing you saw on the news. It's so hard, life is so complex, so you go slow, you try to unpack it.

In school, and I was never a good enough Math student to even get to this point, but sometimes a teacher will have to tell their student, I can't explain that to you right now. I know what you are driving at, but you just have to trust me.

When I visit people who are sick, or who are close to dying, I get that sense too, they are trying to explain something to me, but I just cannot get there, because I am on the other side from where they are.

In all those interactions, there is something holy going on, something beyond words. Humor by way of the Holy Spirit is oftentimes the most reliable guide.

St. Augustine said: "If you don't believe in the Trinity, you will lose your soul; if you try to understand it, you will lose your mind."⁷

That's the Perception: We make attempts with words like personae and hypostasis and homousian and all sorts of Greek terms to explain the Trinity or make sense of God, but we fall short.

The Reality is different.

I always like to quote from my grandfather on Trinity Sunday from a sermon he gave 60 years ago: "When we look at God we should not expect anything less complex than we find in ourselves." Living in complex and mysterious times, this is Good News.

AMEN

⁷ [The trinity and the nearness of God - The Washington Post](#) BUT [Who Said "The Trinity: Try to Understand It, and You'll Lose Your Mind"?](#) (scriptoriumdaily.com)