

The Most Holy Trinity is one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest mystery of our faith. God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. Neither of them are the Holy Spirit. Yet somehow these three distinct persons all share the one nature of God. One God but three persons. The analogies we use to try to understand the Trinity; sunshine, water, three leaf clover, ultimately fail us, and often lead us into a heresy of one form or another. It is easy to see why so many people throughout our history have simply labeled it a mystery and moved on to other things.

But a mystery is not something we have no hope of understanding. A mystery is something that we can understand to the extent that God reveals it to us. And a Trinity is how God has chosen to reveal Himself to the world.

In the First Letter of St. John, the Evangelist tells us, "God is love." This is a truly remarkable statement and one we don't seem to give much thought to.

In other religions, man searches for God, and so man arrives at an understanding of God that is limited by his finite nature.

But with Christianity, God comes in search of man. And so man's understanding of God is based on what God has revealed to us about Himself. Through Jesus, God has shown us exactly who He is and what He is like. And His most fundamental characteristic, is not power, or knowledge, or even transcendence. God's most fundamental characteristic is love.

This explains why Jesus came to us in the first place. It is the most popular verse in the Bible, John 3:16. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

This also tells us something about the Trinity. Love is always expressed in relation to another, a relationship of self giving. If God were solitary how can He be love? God can only be love if He is both one and three divine persons, each one fully divine, living from all eternity in an unbreakable unity of mutual love.

God is one, but He is not solitary.

The Father loves the Son with His entire being, and that love is returned by the Son. The love between them is so strong it is manifested as a third person, the Holy Spirit. It is that spirit, the Spirit of God, the love of God, the third person of the Most Holy Trinity, that is imparted to us at baptism. St. Paul told us; “the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Each of these divine persons is fully God. When we pray, we pray in the name (singular) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We do not pray in the “names.” (plural)

When God came to Abraham in the form of three visitors, Abraham addressed them in the singular, “Lord, as thou lovest me, do not pass thy servant by.”

This is the central mystery of our faith, one God, three divine persons.

This is hard for us to understand. Our minds cannot completely grasp this mystery. And yet consider that the very fact that we cannot understand it, speaks to its truth.

No human mind could have conceived such a contradiction. It shows that God, who is infinite, exists in a way that we, as finite creatures cannot fully understand. And that makes perfect sense. God should exist in a way that is beyond our understanding.

Christianity is unique in this way. To say that all religions are the same is simply not true and displays a close-minded intolerant attitude. It is a refusal to show any respect at all to what religious people truly believe.

True tolerance and open-mindedness toward others and their beliefs is very rare these days. But this has not always been the case.

When St. Francis of Assisi preached Christianity to the Muslims, he didn't use violence, or hatred. He listened. And then he explained. He did not convert them all but his sincerity and his patience led to one Muslim leader converting to Christianity on his deathbed.

I often think that if, throughout the course of entire lives, we have contributed to the salvation of a single soul, it will have been a life well-lived.

But to do this we must understand what it means to be truly open-minded.

One of my favorite stories refers to the first Christian missionaries in England. Edwin, the king of the pagan Angles, met with his counselors to determine how the missionaries and their strange, new doctrine, should be received.

One of the king's advisors said this:

"The present life of man, O king, seems to me, like that time which is unknown to us.

Consider, you sit in your banquet room at supper in winter, with your commanders and ministers, and a good fire in the midst, whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad.

While you are so engaged, a sparrow swiftly flies in at one door, and then just as swiftly flies out another. Whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry storm.

But after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, into the dark winter from which he had emerged.

So this life of man appears for a short space, but of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant.

If, therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed."

As Christians, we believe we have the path to eternal life and salvation. But we have many brothers and sisters who do not believe this. God has tasked us with the mission of helping them find the path. This is not done through violence, hatred, or inflammatory speech. This is done through listening with sincerity, respecting the differences that exist among us, and explaining our own beliefs with patience.

In 2008 Pope Benedict XVI addressed a gathering of representatives from different religions. His words can equally apply to the social unrest we are experiencing in our country today.

"Dear friends," he said, "in our attempt to discover points of commonality, perhaps we have shied away from the responsibility to discuss our differences with calmness and clarity."

The real heart of a dialogue that will lead to peaceful co-existence, is found in a respectful willingness to understand what others believe, and to explain convincingly and accurately, what we believe.

We must know our own faith. We must know what we believe so that we can explain it clearly to others. We must never be satisfied with a superficial understanding of what we believe. We live in a globalized world and must realize the potential even our most minor day to day interactions have to effect change.

There is no excuse for us to not be able to defend our beliefs. We recently heard St. Paul remind us, "be persistent whether it is

convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.”

We have more resources available to us now than at any point in history. Within seconds we can find out not only what the Church teaches on any given subject, but why it teaches it as well.

Our Lord left us with a great commission. We are sent out into the world to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In the name of God we are sent out to do nothing less than expand God's love to the entire world.

I will leave you with one last thought from Pope Benedict.

"By giving ourselves generously to this sacred task - through dialogue and countless small acts of love, understanding and compassion - we can be instruments of peace for the whole human family."