



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"Meaning Something"**
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Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament Genesis 1:1-2:3
Epistle 2 Corinthians 13:11-14
Gospel Matthew 28:16-20

The bishop has offered me the unusual honor of preaching while he's present. [9:30: This is unusual since it is the bishop's prerogative to preach to his people when he celebrates the Eucharist.] And having me do it today is, may I say, the *easy way out for him!* What can one say in the space of a few minutes' sermon about the Trinity that will help you to understand it better? The answer is- there is *nothing at all* that can make it easier except to tell you to get to know God even more. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that the Christian Church believes was revealed to men and women of faith as they studied the Scriptures, met together in fellowship, and got to know God through the Person of Jesus and in the communion of the Holy Spirit. The 'Iglesia ni Cristo' is absolutely wrong in claiming that the Trinity was "made up" by the Roman Catholic Church. The Trinity is the nature of God revealed by God himself to his people at the time when the Church was one body professing one faith, before the sin of denominationalism tore apart the seamless robe of Christ.

If one is to understand the Trinity, therefore, one has to get to know God. And to get to know God is to enter into his family and get to know his other children, too. That is where the Church comes in. It is the association of people called out by God from the world to become a new people who respond to Him. Acknowledging God the Father who made the world as revealed in his Son Jesus Christ and being empowered

by the Holy Spirit is what the Church is all about. It's not about being social, or eating lunch, or listening to fine music, or (to use that truly awful phrase) "Getting something out of the experience." No, we are here to "be" who we are and we are here to "give" of what we have to give. What we "get" is entirely secondary to the purpose of claiming who we are meant to be: the Spirit-led People of God in the Church founded by Jesus Christ.

And how do we do that? How do we become members of that Church? It doesn't happen by signing up to join Trinity parish, I'm afraid. It doesn't come by pledging. It doesn't come by just showing up on Sunday and sitting in the pew. No, it comes by making a commitment in your life that says: "This whole Christian "thing" means something to me. I want to be part of it. I want that life-changing power that others have had." And so one joins in the mystical death of Christ and rises again with him into new life: making what he did for the world a personal experience.

For the early Christians, this was signified by Baptism. I'm afraid that Baptism doesn't mean as much anymore in a society in which most babies are baptised while very, very small and the ceremony is treated as a time to name the child, cement family and business relationships and get gifts.

If we remember that in the earliest days of our Faith, being a Christian could be a capital offense- something you could die for- then perhaps all this fuss makes more sense. Making a personal statement of faith was an act of courage then, not peer pressure, and what was said actually meant something. (Ah, the good old days!) Babies can't do that, and so they miss out on the life-changing experience of being born again through Baptism and knowing it.

7:30

But from time to time we review our baptismal vows and renew our relationship with the God who reveals himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And that brings us back to the theme of today's celebration: the mystery of the Holy Trinity as worshiped in this place. Ours is a parish made up of many peoples, continuing the heritage of Anglicanism

here in Manila that encompasses Americans and Europeans, Tagalogs and Chinese, Ilocanos, Igorots and many, many others who follow our way of living the Christian life. It is a way of living that is based not on dogma or even the Word alone, but on relationships as proclaimed by both of those things: a living, growing and empowering thing known by the embracing term of Communion. And that is the key to any approach to the mystery of God. So on this Trinity Sunday, don't lose your mind trying to understand every detail of the inner workings of God; but do find your soul as you approach this mysterious God in faith, in hope and in love.

9:30:

But there is hope, and that is why we are here today, celebrating our special day in this very traditional fashion by asking the Holy Spirit to come into the lives of these young people here. They now that Baptism and Confirmation used to belong together and were part of a wonderful rite of Christian initiation that concluded with the celebration of the Easter Eucharist: the first communion of the newly baptised. Their Confirmation today doesn't make them "members of the Church": they already are. That happened whenever it was that they were baptised; they know that. But they also know that they want to take responsibility for the commitment rather unfairly made for them so long ago. They want this Christian Faith to be their own; they want the Christian Church to be their family; and they want to affirm that here today. It's all really rather exciting, especially for old codgers like us who may have given up on the excitement and the deeply personal meaning of actually having a Faith to believe in.

[Personal address]:

The group being presented today has been prepared by Mr Ursua and myself. I am very proud of their progress and of their understanding of the basics of our Christian Faith and am sure that they will use their faith to let God make great things of them in their lives. But I have a few personal words for them about what is about to happen to them.

Confirmation isn't magic- it won't get you better grades or a girl- or boyfriend or a job abroad. It is only a refreshing pause on the journey of your life in Christ. Use it, enjoy it, and cultivate its strengths.

Be prepared for disappointment in your life in the Church. Your clergy may disappoint you, your Church leaders may disappoint you, but they are not the whole Church- you are: you who are doing the work of the Church out there in the world.

Be aware that you may not "get" anything out of Christianity all the time; so don't approach your faith as a consumer, but as a believer. It may take time to make sense of it all, but it's worth doing it step by step and not all at once.

But be especially aware that God has chosen you long ago and that he is very happy that you have responded to his offer to be in his family. And he wants to hear from you that you want this too. We'll give you the opportunity to say this in just a few minutes.

And last, but not least: you will never be alone-the Spirit is here and a whole lot of it will be leaving with you today- going where you go, empowering you to do greater things than you ever thought you could. And all of these things will be happening to you sa isang pamilya, sa pamilya ng Diyos, sa simbahan ni Kristo.

You've been part of this family for a long time, but now you are invited to take it seriously. But please don't forget to enjoy it, too. It's one of the best adventures anyone can have! So be strong, and may the Holy Spirit show you many wonderful surprises!