



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: **"Living the Trinity"**
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Genesis 18:1-15
Second Reading Revelation 4:1-11
Gospel John 16:12-15

Fr Tyler has been very bold: he changed the first reading from the one officially appointed for today and replaced it with the reading from Genesis. Let me tell you why.

The reading from Genesis describes the strange and mysterious visit from God to the Patriarch Abraham. God's presence is shown by the visit of three strangers who come out of the desert and visit the old man to tell him and his wife that they will be the ancestors of a great people. Early Christians listened to this description carefully. They noted that it said that "*the Lord* appeared to Abraham", but that Abraham "*saw three men* standing hear him." For our forebears in the Christian faith, this seemed to prefigure the "God in Three Persons: Blessed Trinity" that we sing about today. This image was used in early Christian art, and it remains the way that Christians of the Eastern tradition prefer to envision the Trinity. That's why we have an icon, or picture of this Old Testament scene at our front door, and why the three figures are used in our banners and vestments today. The figures may have wings, but they're not angels. They are the strange visitors who came to Abraham, but who are described collectively as "the Lord": Three Persons, One God.

Both theologians and art historians have tried to decide just which of the three figures is the Father, which the Son, and which the Holy Spirit. I have my own theory that I can share with you sometime. But perhaps it's better to leave that as something of a mystery. After all, no-one can see God as He truly, except perhaps in the Person of Jesus, and we don't know even what he looked like either. As I mentioned last week, all of our attempts to show pictures of God will fail, let alone trying to understand the inner workings of the Trinity. More important is the idea that God has revealed Himself as a *Being in Relationship*, and that He has told us through Jesus Christ that we are to share that intimacy. As John's Gospel tells us, Jesus prays to His Father "that *they may be one as we are one.*" Nothing gets closer than that.

That gives us a very difficult assignment as members of a church that bears the title we have here at Holy Trinity. Other churches may be named after figures in Scripture or history, like St Mary, St John and St Stephen. These congregations may wish to follow the examples of such holy men and women in their life in Christ, and that's a noble goal. But we have a far more difficult task: to represent the *internal unity of God Himself* in our life and work- the intimacy and the coordinated effort that comes not just from human beings trying to "get along", but from aspiring to the highest standard imaginable. We are meant to be *like God* in the way that we work with each other. That's truly *frightening*. It is also the *greatest honor* that God in Christ could bestow on the Church, and we have John's words in the Gospel to thank for passing on our "orders": "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one." (17:23)

Holy Trinity parish is known for many things. We are generally known, inaccurately, as the rich foreigners' church by members of our denomination in the Philippines. We are known as the liturgical non-Catholic alternative to Union Church in the expat community. Being hidden away from the road here means that most people can ignore us completely. But when they do make it here, what do they find? Is it a place that represents that highest ideal of cooperation and unity that Jesus wanted? Is it a place of peace, of constructive challenge and of witness to the transforming power of Jesus Christ? That's really up to you and to me to decide and to make true for us. It

means taking our official title seriously, not just using it as a brand name because Bishop Brent liked it back a hundred years ago.

There is another style of artwork that represents the Trinity. It is nowhere as sublime as the Old Testament image of Abraham's guests, but it is also very popular. We have an example of it by the side door: God the Father represented by an old man with a beard; God the Son shown as Christ on the Cross; and God the Holy Spirit in the dove from the story of Jesus' Baptism. In my opinion, all of the images except the cross are faulty: do we really think that God is an old man or a pigeon? Do we *want* Him to be?

But that image is famous for a rather significant reason. Versions of this artwork are seen set up on columns all over Europe in town squares and country wayside shrines. They were put up beginning in the late Middle Ages as an attempt to stop the epidemics that decimated the population from time to time. The city of Vienna in Austria alone has eleven such columns. Only the power of the Trinity itself was seen as strong enough to ward off the plague. To look at the image of the Trinity, however flawed, was to hope for life.

I believe that we as a church have a similar function to those Trinity columns. We have been put here as a sign to our communities: pinoy, chinoy and expat, that God is known to us as *Three Persons in community*, and that He is best represented when we work together. That is done not just in potlucks and fund-raisers, but in the way we love and help and encourage each other both in and out of this church building. Sin and the effects of sin, are like a plague that is killing off the best not only of Philippine culture but of world humanity, compassion and courage. When people look to us, as they did with the symbolic columns in old Europe, they should see the Trinity as a sign of hope and of life. That is as much our purpose as our worship, our education and our fellowship, because those other things flow from it like water from a spring.

Ultimately, the best symbol of the Holy Trinity we can have is not the old man and the bird or even the three visitors to Abraham, but the mutual love and cooperation

of a church community that chooses to reflect God in Three Persons in their own, multicolored, multicultural and mutually supportive lives. May the Holy Trinity remain not only our *name*, but also our "standard operating procedure"- God in Three Persons, living, loving and working in us.

Again, as Jesus prayed: "...So that they may be one, as we are one...so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."