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The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity (B)

Who is God? This is the central question that the Church asks and celebrates today on this, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. Who is God?

This is the very question Moses asked when he encountered the Lord in the burning bush. After receiving his mission to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, Moses asked, "But when I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' if they ask me, 'What is his name?' what am I to tell them?" (Exodus 3:13). In other words, "Who are you?" This is the same question Saul asks of Jesus before he follows him and spreads his Gospel as the great Apostle, Paul: "Who are you, sir?" (Acts 9:5).

Do we not each ask this question of God: "Who are you?" Moses is given this answer: "I am who am" (Exodus 3:14). Saul is given this answer: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting (Acts 9:5). At the moment these two answers were given they were not especially helpful and certainly did not really clarify the strangeness of the two situations. Indeed, concerning the answer given to Moses, Pope Benedict remarks that the answer, "I

am who am," "seems much more like a refusal to give a name than the announcement of a name."¹ And so it is with us.

The more that we seek to define God, the more that we seek to fully understand him, the more that we desire to say, "This is God," the more he will elude us. Saint Augustine said, *si comprehendis, non est Deus* - "If you understand him, he is not God".² Because God is infinitely different and greater than us, we can never fully grasp him, we can never fully comprehend him. Before all of our questions, before all of our intelligence and reflections we will always learn that the more we know about God the less we truly know about him. This being said, what then are we to say to our question, "Who is God?"

Many years ago I ask this very same question, "Who is God?" I did not ask this question in so many words, but the very pain of my being cried out to the Lord with this question. After the death of my Father, I, as an eight year-old boy whose world had been torn asunder, cried out to the Lord in great pain and agony demanded an answer as to why my Father have suddenly died. Two years later, I again cried out to him in pain and agony this time demanding an answer to my mother's death. A never did receive an answer as to why my parents died, nor do I think I

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*. J. R. Foster, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 86.

² Saint Augustine, *Sermon 52*, 16.

ever really expected one. But I did learn something very profound through this pivotal experience.

The more that I questioned, the more that I demanded an answer, the more that I wept and yelled, the more I came to realize the presence of God around me. It is, really, and indescribable sensation and realization to know that God is with you. All that I can say is that I felt very much at peace even though the two people whom I loved most in the entire world are no longer with me. The more that I questioned God's reasons and purposes, the more I asked God, "Who are you?" perhaps without even knowing it.

I do not know if this is an ancient saying or not, but if it is not it certainly should be: We cannot love what we do not know. As I asked God, "Who are you?" The more I felt him saying to me, "I know your pain. I suffer with you. I have suffered for you. I loved you. You are mine. Come to me."

But I did not realize at the time was that in feeling the Lord say to me, "I love you," he was revealing to me the very essence of who he is. We know, first and foremost that "God is love" (I John 4:16). We know, too, as the Holy Father teaches us, "Love is always '*mysterium*' - more than one can reckon or grasp by subsequent reckoning. Love itself - the uncreated, eternal God - *must* therefore be in the highest degree a mystery

- 'the' *mysterium* itself".³ So then, God is love and love is a mystery, therefore God is a mystery. But then is this all that we can say about God? Is this all that he has said to us? Of course not.

With the love of God as our starting point, we realize - as Pope Benedict reminded us in his Encyclical Letter - that he alone has created all things, he alone has created each of us. "Consequently, his creation is dear to him, for it was willed by him and 'made' by him" (*Deus caritas est*, 9). We learn also that "this God loves man" (*Deus caritas est*, 9).

In Jesus Christ, we realize also that "God's passionate love for his people - for humanity - is at the same time a forgiving love. It is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice" (*Deus caritas est*, 10).

One could, in fact, say that God is a relationship of love. It is precisely because God is love that God is a relationship of persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One could see the Father as the Lover the Son as the Beloved and the Holy Spirit as the Love shared between the Father and the Son. In this way God is a community of love, three persons all in one: the Blessed Trinity. It is because God is a community of love that he calls each of us true receive his love and to share his love. in short, he and invites each of us to be in a relationship of

³ Ibid., 114.

love with him. Such is the beauty and the wonder of the power of love.

This is, admittedly, still a difficult concept for our minds to grasp. We ask, how can there be one God, and yet three persons within the Godhead? All I can tell you is that from my faith and from my experience I know this to be true. I cannot explain it any better than this. Many of the saints have tried and this, it seems to me, is the best explanation that we can have. We must be satisfied, then, to keep this mystery - this mystery of great and divine love - before us always.

In the scientific and rationalistic age in which we live, we want to have control of everything around us. We want to explain everything away and remove all mystery. In short, we want to be in charge of our lives and of our surroundings. My friends, this we simply cannot do. Let us then instead follow the wisdom of Saint Francis of Assisi, who encourages us with these words:

Let us desire nothing else, let us want nothing else, let nothing else please us and cause us delight except our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior, the only true God, let nothing hinder us, nothing separate us, nothing come between us.⁴

⁴ Saint Francis of Assisi, *Earlier Rule* 23:9-10.