



SACRED HEART CHURCH OF THE FIRST PEOPLES

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TRINITY SUNDAY—C *A Triune God Who Suffers*

In 2007 Dr. Hannah Kassis, an expert on Islam, was asked to speak about the culture and religion of Islam to the assembly of northern and western Canadian bishops.

Dr. Hannah's love for the Muslims, their language and culture, and his intimate knowledge of Islam shone through his presentations; so much so that he was asked why he did not become a Muslim.

The main reason he gave in response was because the Muslims have no concept of a suffering God. For the Muslims, Allah is One, Great and Almighty. All ninety-nine attributes of the Supreme Being that they often pray have to do with the power and glory of Allah. It is impossible for a Muslim to conceive that Allah would have any weakness, any tendency to suffer in any way. For this reason, and because of his own faith in Jesus, a Messiah who was able to suffer, Dr. Kassis said he could never become a Muslim.

There is a great mystery, and great wisdom, in our faith in God as Trinity, as family and relationship, open to suffering for the sake of that relationship. Our faith is in Jesus Christ who, true to the will of the Father and empowered by the Spirit, showed the depth of the Father's love through suffering.

In the Gospel today, Jesus plunges directly into the heart of this mystery. The Father and Jesus are one; all that Jesus has he has been given from the Father. The Spirit and Jesus are also one; all that the Spirit has he has received from Jesus. That Spirit, given to us by Jesus at Pentecost and through baptism, fills us with divine gifts, gifts that make us one with the Father.

In the second reading, St. Paul explores this mystery for the Romans. Paul teaches that faith in Jesus gains us access to the grace of God that is the Holy Spirit. That Spirit then fills us - pours into us, all kinds of gifts. One of those gifts is to be able to suffer like Jesus who is the suffering serv-

God's grace is
 wrapped up
 in a person:
 Jesus.

ant of God, who suffered for us out of self-sacrificial love. The Spirit of that same Jesus, according to St. Paul, will give us the strength and endurance to even boast of our sufferings for the sake of Jesus and out of love for others.

Paul then provides a whole spirituality of suffering. Suffering out of faith in Jesus and love for others produces endurance, and endurance produces character. How true it is there are lessons in life that only suffering will teach us. That character then produces hope, a hope that is the assurance of the presence of God's Spirit within us. That hope is also a source of joy in being made like Christ who himself suffered for us. That is the mystery of our faith, faith in Jesus who is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Let us turn to another expert on the nature of God, Fr. CantaleMESSA, the papal preacher, who puts it this way:

“The Christian response to the problem of innocent suffering is wrapped up in one name: Jesus Christ! Jesus did not come to give us expert explanations about suffering; he came rather silently to take it upon himself. Taking it upon himself, however, he changed it entirely: from a sign of malediction, he made it an instrument of redemption.... Even more: he made it the supreme value, the highest order of greatness in this world. This is a type of suffering that brings us closer to God. Only God, in fact, suffers as innocent in an absolute sense.”

We have all seen persons who have shown much love through the acceptance of perhaps a handicapped child, who have given themselves selflessly to that child and grown into patient, compassionate, beautiful human beings because of the suffering they have accepted with faith and love. That is the mystery of life connecting us with our Triune God who is family and relationship, and who in Jesus was able to show us the way of redemptive suffering.

The Eucharist makes present for us the love of Jesus for the Father in accepting the cross. It is made possible through the power of the same Spirit that filled him with faith in the Father's love and empowers us to do the same.

So, let us put our complete faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as family and relationship, and express that faith in our willingness to suffer for others as Jesus did for us.

Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie, OMI



GOD'S SENSE OF HUMOR

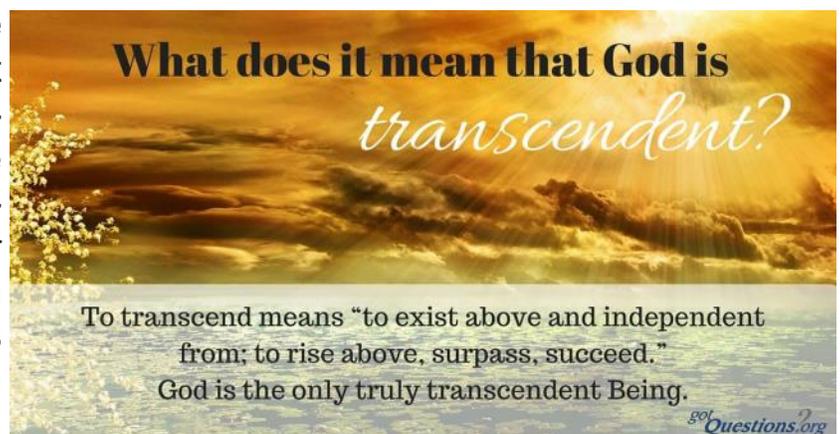
If we genuinely trust scripture, our own experience, and our own sanity, we can only conclude that God has a sense of humor, and a robust and sneaky one at that. Where's the evidence?

A generation ago, Peter Berger wrote a remarkable little book entitled, *A Rumor of Angels*. Unlike Aquinas, Anselm, Descartes, and a number of renowned philosophers, he didn't try to "prove" the existence of God through logic and argumentation. Rather, he simply examined a number of very ordinary human experiences and pointed to what's hidden inside and behind the walls of those experiences. For instance, when a mother soothes and calms a frightened child at night, assuring the child that there is nothing to fear, she does this in good faith only because at some deep level she intuitively that ultimately everything is all right. In effect, unconsciously, she is praying a Creed.

Now, one of the experiences Berger highlights is the experience of humor. Here's his thesis: no matter how oppressive and dire the circumstance, human beings always have the capacity to make light of it, to view it through the prism of irony and humor. For example, martyrs have joked with their executioners and, no doubt, there was some banter, sarcasm, irony, and bitter humor at times inside extermination camps. The fact that people can do this, and do in fact do it, shows that there is always something transcendent inside us, something over which no human oppression has power, something that sets us above any situation within which we find ourselves. Our sense of irony and humor manifests that something in our soul sets us above anything that can beset us.

And, this can have its source in only one place, inside of the Creator who made us. Thus, not only must God have a sense of humor, humor must be something inherent within the nature of God, since humor is good and God is the author of all that is good.

There's a school of classical philosophy that believes God has four transcendental properties. God, it teaches, is One, True, Good, and Beautiful – to this we can add, Humorous. Moreover, this can be inferred from more than just the fact that sometimes we sense that humor manifests our transcendence within a given situation. More importantly, we can infer that humor has some godliness from examining the component parts of love. God is love, and humor is undeniably an important part of love.



When the classical Greek philosophers defined love, they highlighted a number of components within it, namely, erotic attraction, obsession, friendship, pragmatic arrangement, and altruism. However, they also highlighted another component, playfulness/banter/humor. How insightful. Humor along with healthy banter and playful teasing are part of the grease that enables us to sustain relationships long term, despite the inevitable over-familiarity, hurt, disappointment, and boredom that beset even the most loving relationships. Humor helps make it all work. Thus, since it is an innate part of love, it is an innate part of God.

Does God have a sense of humor?



No one has a better developed sense of humor than the Ones who invented the whole concept of laughter.

Sadly, we don't often picture God that way. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have this in common. We all picture God as male, celibate, solemn – and humorless. How might we picture God differently?

If you were to draw up a composite face representing God, whose face would you include in this picture? The pious face of the gentle, blond-haired Jesus with a lamb on his shoulder we see in our holy pictures? Images of a serenely composed and quiet Mary that

we see depicted in our statues of her? The face of Mother Teresa? The face of Therese of Lisieux? The face of Dorothy Day? Of Martin Luther King? Of Oscar Romero? Of Billy Graham? Of Henri Nouwen? Of Rachel Held Evans? The face of your mother or father? Would you also include the face of your favorite comedian or favorite wit? Jerry Seinfeld? Bette Midler? Rowan Atkinson? The mischievous face of your colorful uncle telling a joke?

Any picture of God's face needs to manifest an inner soul that is One, True, Good, Beautiful, but also Humorous and Mischievous. Funny, while I believe that God is the author of humor, I've never been enamored by the various artistic depictions of Jesus as laughing uproariously. Good idea, good intention, good theology, but to my taste, lacking the right nuance. That kind of laughing face has an ephemeral quality that too easily gives way to something else after it's had its moment. God's face, I suspect, has a quieter, sneaker, more permanent mischievousness to it.

If this is true, if God not only has a sense of humor but is also the author of humor itself, then humor is an important quality within sanctity and holiness. What makes for wholeness, maturity, holiness, love, and for the kind of person you want beside you at the table, here and at the eternal one in heaven? Certainly you want someone who manifests the qualities that Jesus asked for in the Sermon on the Mount – along with a warm, playful, and mischievous sense of humor.

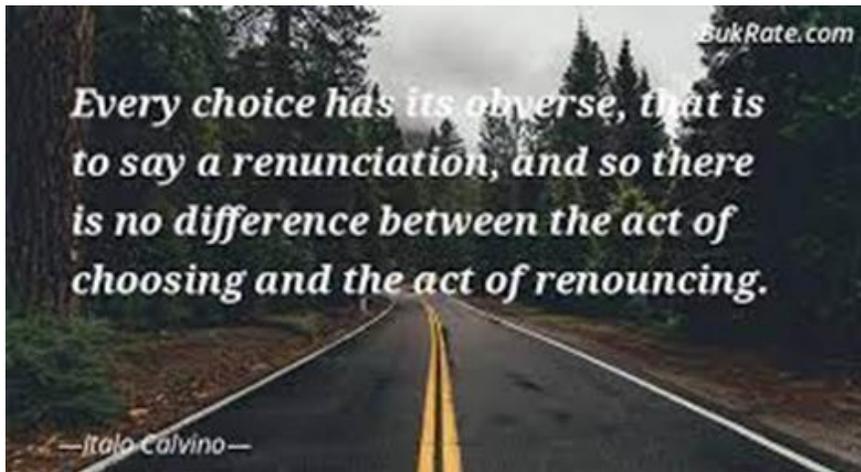
Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE AND ITS COST

Thomas Aquinas once said, “Every choice is a renunciation”.

Every choice is a series of renunciations: If I marry one person, I cannot marry anyone else; if I live in one place, I cannot live anywhere else; if I choose a certain career, that excludes many other careers; if I have this, then I cannot have that. The list could go on indefinitely. To choose one thing is to renounce others. That’s the nature of choice.

In most areas of our lives, we do not feel this so painfully. We choose and there isn’t a lot of sting to the loss. But the area of love is more sensitive. Here we feel the sting of loss more strongly and here we often find it hard to accept the real limits of life. What are those limits? They are the limits that come with being an infinite spirit in a finite world.



We are fired into this world with a madness that comes from the gods and has us believe that we are destined to embrace the cosmos itself. We don’t want something, we want everything. That’s a simple way, though a good one, of saying something that Christianity has always said, namely, that in body and soul we are meant to embrace everyone and we already hunger for that.

Perhaps we experience it most clearly in our sexuality, but the hunger is everywhere present in us. Our yearning is wide, our longing is infinite, our urge to embrace is promiscuous. We are infinite in yearning, but, in this life, only get to meet the finite.

That’s what makes love difficult. We are over-charged for our own lives. We have divine fire inside us, want everything, yearn for the whole world, and yet, at a point, have to commit to one particular person, at one particular place, and in one very particular life, with all the limits that imposes.

Infinite desire limited by a finite choice, such is the nature of real life and love. Life and love, beyond the abstract and beyond the grandiosity of our own daydreams, involve hard, painful renunciation. But it is precisely that very renunciation that helps us grow up and makes our lives real in a way that our daydreams don’t.

Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas

READINGS FOR HOLY TRINITY SUNDAY

FIRST READING

A reading from the Book of Proverbs (Proverbs 8.22-31)

Thus says the Wisdom of God:

“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.

“Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth —
when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world’s first bits of soil.

“When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of Adam.”

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Psalm 8)

Response: O Lord, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what is a man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? R.

Yet you have made him a little lower than the Angels, and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. R.

All sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. R.

SECOND READING

A reading from Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 5.1-5)

Brothers and sisters: Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Thanks be to God

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Alleluia.

Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: to God who is, who was, and who is to come.

Alleluia.

GOSPEL READING

A reading from the Gospel according to John (John 16.12-15)

Jesus said to his disciples: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples

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