

If Only We Suffer With Him

On Sunday, I celebrated Confirmation for five adults in Cheyenne. The homily is below.

The Trinity is the foundation of human existence. You cannot understand who you are and the meaning of your life unless you understand the Holy Trinity. We are created in the image and likeness of God, but we rarely reflect on what that means, or how it should be reflected in our relationships. If Christians in the United States would live their faith in the Trinity, then every problem in society would be overcome.

The best way to understand how the Trinity impacts our lives is to recall how Jesus lives in the mystery of the Trinity. He declared that the Father and the Son dwell together in deep intimacy. He said, ***“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me”*** (Jn. 14:10-11). The indwelling of the Father and the Son means that Jesus’ words and actions are the same as the Father’s words and actions.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons, yet they dwell in each other. They exist for each other, and they share everything they have. Jesus said, ***“Everything that the Father has is mine”*** (Jn. 16:15). The Father and the Son are perpetually giving themselves to each other. Their reciprocal giving overflows and generates new life which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts.

From all eternity, God planned to invite us into the relationship of the Trinity. This grace makes us like the Son. As St. Paul said, ***“those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God... The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God... [We are] heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him”*** (Rm. 8:15-16). Just as he received everything that the Father possessed, we will be filled with the Father’s glory, if we suffer with Christ. Paul is reminding us that we need to give our lives for the good of others, like Christ who suffered for the good of humanity.

That is the only way for us to live because the Father has been so immeasurably generous to us in forgiving us when we were dead in our sins. We need to reflect that generous love toward others. We need to suffer with Christ for the good of others.

Last Tuesday, the chancery staff had a retreat led by Fr. Ed Kinerk, SJ from the Sacred Heart Retreat House in Sedalia, CO. He described the effect of the Trinity in our lives in this way. Because God makes us his sons and daughters, we are brothers and sisters with every person on earth. In heaven we will live in perfect love with others as one family. So right now, we should work each day on living as brothers and sisters. If we do not learn how to do that, then we will not be able to live in heaven.

At least, that is how C.S. Lewis described heaven in his book *The Great Divorce*. He gives the image of people getting on a bus which takes off vertically and lands in heaven. When they step out, each person is met by someone in heaven. One woman sees a handsome man walking toward her, but when he gets closer she recognizes him as her ex-husband. In shock she asks, “What are you doing here?” He declares that the Lord has forgiven him for all his wrongs, and he was sent to welcome her. She refuses to be with him, and she gets back on the bus.

She denied her creation and baptism. She was created in the image of the Holy Trinity who is merciful love. She was baptized into the Trinity who infused her with God’s steadfast love. She

was freely forgiven and made an adopted daughter of God. But she could not accept her former husband as her brother. She could not love her enemy, as Jesus commanded (Mt. 5:44).

As I confirm the five adults today, the grace of their Baptism is perfected. Confirmation strengthens you to be more like Christ, to be conformed to Christ. You will experience more distinctly the indwelling of the Father, Son, and Spirit. When the indwelling of the Holy Spirit comes to perfection in you, then you will suffer with Christ, so that you may also be glorified with him.

In Confirmation, you share in the commission that Jesus gave to the first disciples. He told them, ***“Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you”*** (Mt. 28:19). Being confirmed not only makes you a disciple, but you are sent to make disciples. Jesus describes two integral elements for making disciples. They are to be baptized in the name of the Trinity, and they must be taught to observe his commands. Baptizing refers to an intimate relationship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. Teaching means to form people in the way of Jesus that they might imitate him.

First, you are sent to help people experience their baptism. The ritual of Baptism is normally performed by clergy. However, think beyond the ritual. Think of how often you make the sign of the cross and say, *“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”* Each time we are reminded of our baptism. Each time we recall the indwelling of the Trinity. Our adoption as God’s sons and daughters is renewed.

In essence, Jesus said to make disciples by instilling in them the intimacy of God, by forming them to live as beloved sons and daughters of God. Many people ignore this aspect of making disciples. They focus exclusively on teaching, rather than fostering intimacy with God. Keep as your first priority faithful daily prayer and Sunday Eucharist. As St. Paul says, “Live in Christ.” Only then will you be effective teachers of the faith.

Step two in making disciples is to teach people to forgive as Christ forgave, to love one another as he loved us. Act like Christ. Speak like him. Keep pondering his commands so that you may imitate him. Then you will make disciples around you.

People will see that you live in the Trinity and that you are constantly being conformed to Christ. You will not be perfect, but you will grow steadily in his way. They will see the fruit of the Spirit in you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

When you understand the loving relationship of the Holy Trinity, then you understand who you are and the meaning of your life. We are created in the image and likeness of God, and we were baptized into the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Like the Trinity, we exist to pour out our lives for each other and for the world. By Baptism and Confirmation, God blesses us as joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him.

We are called to love and forgive and die for the good of others. If Christians in the United States would live their faith in the Trinity, then every problem in society would be overcome. We would live as brothers and sisters in God’s family. Our generosity, forgiveness, and mutual love would transform the world.

God keeps teaching us this lesson in the saints. One woman being confirmed chose Our Lady of Guadalupe as her saint. Mary was sent by God as a native-born woman pregnant with the Son of God, so that we might see that God makes us his sons and daughters – no matter the color of our

skin. The Lord shares his divinity with us so that we might act as brothers and sisters of one family.