

Who doesn't like a good mystery story? We line up the clues, make guesses about whodunit, and relish twists and surprises at the end. Our logical brains like understanding not confusion, order not chaos, a mystery neatly explained not left unresolved.

Welcome to Trinity Sunday and a mystery that cannot be solved by our very limited human brains. As St. Augustine has said, "Our present notion of God is not it. If we comprehend it, it is not God." This, however, has not stopped us from trying to understand the concept of the Trinity. Over the centuries humans have convened think tanks, developed creeds, established canons and liturgies, and applied countless metaphors to force the idea of the Trinity into an unenforceable mold.

In today's Gospel Jesus says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them right now." My mother was known for saying, "When you get to be my age, you'll understand." This usually annoyed me but she was right. I needed life experiences, more facts & education to have perspective and empathy toward others at each stage of life. In my own journey to understand the mystery I've moved from *what* the Trinity is, to *how* the concept works, to my participation in the *why*, the relationship of the 3 persons of the Trinity.

In SS I was introduced to the Holy *Ghost* as the 3rd part of the Trinity. Really? A ghost!? I chose to focus on Jesus because the song said he loved me. I put aside any serious Trinitarian thoughts until my confirmation into the Lutheran church as a teenager. I had to memorize Luther's catechism for a public exam. My logical brain recited the words & arrogantly embraced my superior knowledge of *what* the Trinity is. In my 20s & 30s I substituted the word "Spirit" for "Ghost" and explored the most mysterious 3rd person of the Trinity. I read Catherine Marshall's late 90s book, *The Helper*, & began to think of the Holy Spirit as a guide in life. I researched common metaphors for the interconnectedness of the Father, Son & HS: a braid, 3 leaf clover, the shell, white, yolk of an egg, or ice, water, steam. Fun images, but still not satisfying theology. Several concepts that I've gravitated to in the last 15 years are the water wheel, a famous Russian icon and the labyrinth.

I've gradually relinquished my need to solve the mystery and to pigeon hole the *what* of the Trinity and have moved to the *how and why*. I focus more on relationships as the foundation of the Trinity. First there was God, alone I imagine for a long long time (again, puny human brain can't comprehend). So much love to give that God created Spirit—the female Wisdom in today's OT lesson. She helped and applauded as God created earth & us—more for God to love. Even when we kept missing & messing up His overtures of love God had infinite patience & hope. (still does!) He sent Jesus to create an eternally accessible direct connection to His Love. God, Son, Spirit sharing Love. St. Bonaventure in the 13th c. described the Trinity as three buckets on a moving waterwheel. Each bucket fills and empties out, then swings back to be filled again. The Father empties Love into the Son who spills Love into the Spirit who then replenishes Love back to the Father. They can empty themselves out because they know they will be filled again. God doesn't want us to view the Trinity from a distance. With the gift of the Spirit, the Helper at Pentecost we are invited into the love spilling from one bucket into another on the water wheel. We are invited to the Divine Dance as Richard Rohr describes it.

The Russian artist Rublev's Trinity icon is an image that has made the Trinity more personal to me. Looking from left to right, we see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Their right hands are pointing to each

other, the Father raising his hand in blessing to the Son. The hand of the Son points on, around the circle, to the Spirit. The Father sends the Son, the Son sends the Spirit. I like to imagine like some scholars who suggest that the rectangle on the front of the table was originally a mirror. Reflecting our image we complete the circle. We are invited to join the group at the table and receive the heart of their being for ourselves. We become part of their flow of Love.

Remaining part of the “in” group of the Trinity is comforting but that’s not our commission from God. We are to enlarge the water wheel, add tributaries to the river of love, include more people around the table. One way of walking a labyrinth illustrates for me taking the Trinity from an individual experience out into the world. In a labyrinth we pray fully wend our walk to a center, then retrace our steps to exit into the wider community and back to our ordinary lives. Everyone in a labyrinth community is in a different place on their spiritual journey. Jesus is our advocate to God & an example of *how* to encounter the other people on the path. We each have our own Helper as a Spirit guide to clarify Jesus’s Truth so we understand better. In the center we may pause to pray, to fill our bucket with Love. Then we follow the Spirit back out into the greater community and to paraphrase our post communion prayer: “to send us out to do the work we have been given, loving and serving as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord.” We are invited to complete the circle, to join the dance, to continue God’s work in the world by our own response.

Jesus promises that the Spirit of the Truth, will guide us into all the truth there is. He or she, Wisdom, won’t draw attention to themselves, but will make sense out of all that Jesus has done and said. They will honor Jesus and as we are ready will be a channel to help us understand the Way of Love that is Jesus’s Truth.

Bottom line Jesus says don’t bother dwelling on solving the mystery of the Trinity. Our minds couldn’t understand anyway. Instead, focus on the *why*: death is not a spiritual relocation where we *go* to Heaven & leave earth behind. Rather, the Spirit helps us begin our eternal life NOW when we jump aboard the water wheel, join the dance or are a guests at Trinity’s table.

In Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*, a contemporary interpretation of John, ch. 14, Jesus says this in his farewell talk to the apostles: “...the Father will provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth....you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be *in* you.”

I have evolved (matured? changed?) from being afraid of the “ghost” part of God to participating — most days—in the loving relationship that I now believe is the Trinity. The tongues of fire that appeared over the apostles on that Pentecost long ago were not a one time event. If the Trinity’s energies were visible to us right now we would be able to see little flames hovering over us or near our hearts. Each of our divine sparks has been *in* us all along Jesus says. The Helper, Friend, Spirit of Truth was activated at the first Pentecost and is always at the ready for us today. We can access this any time *through* prayer, *in* faith, *with* hope.

As Richard Rohr says we have a person of the Trinity who prays in us, through us, with us, for us and in spite of us. What a blessing!

See the flames of the Spirit in each other.

Fan the flames of the Spirit with love.