



Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity - Sr Nuala Cotter

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“Of the making of many books there is no end, and in much study there is weariness for the flesh” (Ecclesiastes 12 : 12).

This quotation from that slightly grumpy Old Testament sage Qoheleth seems apt for someone trying to write about the subject of today’s feast. If we were to pile all the books that have been written on the Trinity over the last 2000+ years on top of each other — I don’t know if they would circle the earth, but they might come close. I hasten to say that I am not able to add to the pile ! What I can do, however, is share three points concerning today’s readings. They are related, but it’s not possible to squeeze them together into a single “essay.” So, three points they remain. I hope they help.

Point #1.

The first reading is so wonderful, so lively, and so evocative of all that is LIFE, that I have to say : Read it again. Read it aloud if you can. Listen again to Lady Wisdom, speaking of the time before time, when she was “poured forth,

at the first, before the earth.

When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no fountains or springs of water ;
before the mountains were settled into place,
before the hills, I was brought forth ;
while as yet the earth and fields were not made,
nor the first clods of the world.”

“When the Lord established the heavens I was there,
when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep ;
when he made firm the skies above,
when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth ;
when he set for the sea its limit,
so that the waters should not transgress his command ;
then was I beside him as his craftsman,

and I was his delight day by day,
playing before him all the while,
playing on the surface of his earth ;
and I found delight in the human race."

That Wisdom, God's "delight," "found delight in the human race" must be one of the loveliest lines in the Bible. God's desire to love us, creatures made in his own image and likeness, is affirmed by his "craftsman," who "played" before him on the "surface of his earth."

Father Roland Murphy, O. Carm., a noted scholar of biblical Wisdom literature, offers some insight into this last line of the passage and the paradox it presents :

Wisdom is both "with God and yet at home in this world. The mystery can be resolved to this extent : Wisdom is a gift from God meant to be the goal for all human searching."

He continues :

"Wisdom mediates between God and the world. Immanent in Creation, she is the source of all meaning about this world. Coming from God, she is also a revelation of God and a call from him to the world. By the same token, the heart of this wisdom is 'the fear of the Lord,' which opens us to heed what God reveals and thus to respond to him. But this divine communication comes not only in terms of knowledge but also in terms of love. It is a divine appeal through creation which seduces, draws, and eventually embraces us."

Point #2 :

Christian theology has connected the figure of Wisdom, Sophia, to Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, whom we can think of as the vital link, the mediator, between ourselves and the Father. In today's gospel, Jesus declares that the one who is coming, the "Spirit of Truth,"

. . .will guide you to all truth.
He will not speak on his own,
but he will speak what he hears,
and will declare to you the things that are coming.
He will glorify me,
because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you."

If we just look at the verbs, we see a kind of job description for the Spirit, whom Jesus has called "the Advocate" (Paraclete) a number of times before this passage. The Spirit will

- *Guide* [the disciples] to all truth
- *Speak* what he hears,
- *Declare* [to the disciples]
- *Glorify* [Jesus]
- *Take* [from what belongs to Jesus - and thus to the Father]
- *Declare* [to the disciples again].

From this list, we may understand that the Spirit is active ; like Sophia "playing" before God as the earth is being created, the Spirit moves. The Spirit's movement acts as a guide for the disciples to understand

that Jesus is the revelation of God, the fulfillment of Scripture. The Spirit helps the disciples - and thus, all of us - to do as Jesus had taught in John 8 : 31-32 : “if you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.”

Point #3 :

Once upon a time, I mentioned to a holy and very “original” Sister that I wanted to study John’s gospel. I will never forget her reply : “Oh, all those words !” She had a point. Many of the words in John, especially in this “Last Discourse,” are hard to understand. It’s good to have teachers and scholars - and the Holy Spirit - to help us !

She was an artist, and my guess is that if you’d asked her about the Trinity, she’d have said : “Oh, just look at Rublev’s icon. All you need to know is there.” So what about that ?

Do you know the fifteenth century icon written by the Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev ? On the one hand, it depicts the hospitality of Abraham received by the three strangers at the Oak of Mamre (Genesis 18). But more profoundly, it is Rublev’s way of showing the Trinity.

You can read all about the icon on the Internet ; you’ll find articles that will explain the symbolism of the colors, the form, and all the rest. But, before you dive into the explanation, first just spend some time with the image. Three beings are in conversation. Three beings create a kind of circle into which your eye — and your heart — are drawn. It is quiet yet deeply animated. Friend, you are being invited to contemplation of the great mystery of God. Rest there for a while.

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Proverbs 8:22-31 ; Psalm 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9 ; Romans 5:1-5 ; John 16:12-15



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