

Commentary for Lectio Divina, Carmel, June 6: The Most Holy Trinity

John 16: 12-15

This afternoon we are going to be pondering the Gospel passage from Year C instead of this year's Gospel. The reason is simple. This year's passage does not mention explicitly the divine three, whereas the passage in Year C does. So I'm taking a bit of liberty here.

We are returning to Jesus' Farewell Discourse in John's Gospel. During the Easter season we spent a lot of time with this portion of his Gospel.

Today's text is found in Chapter 16. Jesus has just explained to his disciples that he must go if the other Advocate—other Paraclete-- is to come. In other words, Jesus needs to lose his spatially and temporally limited existence so that he might become present to his disciples, to all the human race, and indeed to the entire cosmos, in a totally

unrestricted fashion: as the Risen One present to the world in the expansive power of the Spirit.

And then, in a difficult series of verses, Jesus tells his own that those who deliberately close their hearts to him and do the same to them after he leaves them will experience an enormous reversal: the sin of which they accuse Jesus and his friends will come down on their heads; their accusing Jesus and his disciples of unrighteousness will reveal their lack of righteousness, and their negative judging of Jesus and his own will turn into judgment—condemnation—of them.

And now we come to this afternoon's passage which treats of the Spirit as the teacher of the disciples.

Jesus begins by saying, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." Two implications seem to be at work here. First, only Jesus' self-giving death and resurrection will provide the

proper light in which the disciples can appreciate what Jesus has done and taught in his earthly life. And, secondly, Jesus is telling his own what *they* need to know as they move into the future without Jesus' physical presence. But he is not going to be telling them about future generations of disciples and what their situations and experiences will be or how he and the other Advocate will assist them. That would be too much for them to take on, and they don't need to take it on.

“When the Spirit of Truth comes, that Spirit will guide you into all truth.”

This is a very powerful affirmation. The second Advocate, who will stand by the disciples in their travails, is the Spirit of Truth. In John's Gospel “truth” is a rich term. Many decades ago I read Hans Urs von Balthasar's wonderful book entitled *Prayer*. I recall his writing that one of the meanings of “truth” in John's Gospel is “faithful self-presentation.” “Faithful self-presentation” locates truth not first of all

in the world of propositions but in the world of interpersonal relations. For the author of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is the Truth *par excellence*. Jesus is the faithful self-presentation in space, time, and human being, of the One who is the source of all creation and of all self-communication, God- Father (and -Mother). Anyone who knows Jesus knows this ultimate silent abyss from which emerges the divine Word, which became flesh. Jesus is the Truth, or, if you will, the “truthing” of God Father, God Mother.

But there is more. “The Spirit of Truth” in Greek is *to pneuma tes aletheias*. The Spirit is also the Truth in the sense of the one who uncovers what is hidden, who brings to the light goodness that needs to be revealed and the sin and disorder that want to remain in the dark so that they can do their damage. The Greek term, *aletheia* means “unconcealedness” or “the state of not being hidden.” It is the opposite of *lethe*, which means “oblivion,” “forgetfulness,” or “concealment.” All through John’s Gospel Jesus speaks and acts as the faithful self-presentation of the Father, of the Ultimate Origin of all things, and in so

doing, brings to the light the goodness of God's creation and the obstinacy of the "world" understood as that portion of creation that wants to keep its disorder hidden and wants to extinguish the threatening light being brought by Jesus.

Jesus is saying that, when the Spirit comes, the Spirit will act just as Jesus has acted, will render Jesus present to the disciples and indeed all creation, and, just as Jesus did, will bring to light the goodness of creation as well as the hard-heartedness of those unwilling to open themselves to the divine self-offer.

This Spirit of Truth will guide the disciples into all truth. The Spirit will guide the disciples with utter reliability and will lead them into greater and greater depths of the glorified Jesus and of the One for whom the glorified Jesus is the faithful self-presentation. And in every human situation the Spirit will strive to bring into the light God's good creation, both the dignity of all human persons and the original goodness of the

material cosmos. And in every human situation the Spirit will strive to bring into the light everything that demeans the dignity of human persons and everything that wounds the goodness of the material world.

But the Spirit is not an autonomous agent, speaking and acting on its own. It wants only to bring to the disciples all that it has received from Jesus, who, in turn, has received all from God, Source of All. There is profound continuity between the Spirit and Jesus, and Jesus and the One who sent him.

The next phrase, “the Spirit will declare to you the things that are to come” does not mean that the Spirit will foretell future events but rather that the Spirit will draw out, in the new situations that will arise in these disciples’ future, fresh meaning from the events of Jesus’ life.

(Brendan Byrne)

The Spirit of Truth will glorify Jesus, because he will take what is Jesus' and declare it to the disciples. To glorify means here that the Spirit will make Jesus manifest to believers just as Jesus gloried his Father by making the invisible Ultimate Source of All visible to those who were open to this revelation.

The use of the Greek word that is translated "declare" tells us that the Spirit will not offer new revelation but will faithfully bring to light what Jesus said and did in his earthly life and what he is offering disciples after his resurrection.

"All that the Father has is mine." This can be expressed another way: All that the Father is, Jesus has revealed to the disciples.

These four verses offer us Jesus, Jesus' Father, and the Holy Spirit, in their relationship to believers and to creation. Jesus, as the Word and

Son of the Father, is the faithful self-revelation of the Father. The Spirit, as the one given by Jesus, is the faithful self-revelation of Jesus.

Our four verses are all about divine revelation “from above,” from the perspective of God’s initiative.

There is another approach, which we find, for example, in Saint Paul, the approach “from below.”

The Holy Spirit worked in Jesus throughout his earthly life, fashioning him to be, in his humanity, the faithful expression of all God the Father wanted to be for the whole-making of creation. From the beginning of the human race that same Spirit was fashioning all human beings, whether they were explicitly aware of it or not, to be authentic images and likenesses of God. From the very beginning it was all about humans becoming daughters and sons in the Son, authentic “words” of God in *the Word of God*.

Humans were and are created to share fully in the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, and thereby share fully in the life and love of



God Source of All. The Spirit capacitates our humanity to receive Jesus' humanity and divinity. The Spirit does this by purifying the disorder within us and in our relationships with one another and planet earth. But the purification process is not for its own sake. It prepares the ground for the Spirit to "stretch" our souls so that we can become, more and more, *capax Christi, capax Dei*, sharers of the divine life.

Here is where profound spiritual traditions such as that of the Carmelites offer us guidance along this two-fold path of radical purification and communion.

Our entrée into Trinitarian life, without which we cannot become truly human, is by way of increasing identification with the risen Jesus and increasing participation in his relational identity. We are called to relate to God Source of All, to the Holy Spirit, to our fellow human beings, and indeed with to the cosmos, out of the risen Jesus' relationship with those realities.

All our speaking, all our acting, all our “justicing,” all our loving contribute to the inbreaking reign of God insofar as we are rooted in Christ by the power of the Spirit. “I speak, I act, I do justice, I love, no, not I, but Christ speaks, acts, does justice, and loves in me.”

I’ve moved beyond our four verses but we can’t ponder the Trinitarian life without making more and more connections!!

The most important connection for today has so far remained tacit. At the center of the story of Jesus and of Spirit-led disciples is the Cross: the Cross in its obscenity and in its priceless revelation of God’s heart, God’s passion for creation. For the Cross reveals that Jesus died in total identification with all innocent victims, thus revealing that, in their own ways, God Source of all and the Holy Spirit are totally one with all victims as well.

The purification process and the unitive process to which we, as Jesus' friends, are called, goes the way of identity with, solidarity with, all victims. Our path can't be different from Jesus in this respect. After all, aren't we all members of the body of Christ, the Church, and didn't this Church have its origins in the Spirit of the Crucified and Risen Jesus breathed over the disciples, and in the solemn "Shalom" uttered over the disciples in the Upper Room, the Shalom that spelled their being forgiven? The Church was born of Spirit and of offered forgiveness, both gifts coming from the victim.

In our present moment, we turn to the Holy Spirit and to our black and brown sisters and brothers to learn how to stand with them, who have had, and are having, their life-breath pushed out of them in countless ways. And those of us who are white and thereby privileged need the wraps covering that entitlement torn away, so that we recognize our complicity in the stealing of our brothers' and sisters' breath.

I want to conclude this commentary with the familiar doxology, but in its earliest form, before the *lex credendi* re-shaped the prayer to fit an emerging and overly cautious orthodoxy:

“Glory be *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit. Amen.”