

Inscape March 2017

© Stillpoint Contemplative Ministries

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and communion with the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

THE HOLY TRINITY: MYSTICISM OF COMMUNITY

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love in my heart, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1).

If we are to be redeemed, it must be by the strong, persistent love of God, who cloaks himself in deep silence before our selfish, bombastic questionings about God and ourselves and our world. We have been made by God for communion, a “union with” God and all human beings. Another way of putting it is to describe God as a loving community of persons who wish to share their Trinitarian life as we experience their divine love in each event of each day. We begin to move toward loving communion with God and neighbor by means of “communication.” The first step of communication is to relay information to another on a linear level. Such knowledge tends to deal with logical facts, ideas that are comprehensible to our human reasoning. Our sciences are examples of such communication. Making theology exclusively a “science” is another example of such knowledge.

LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

But there is a higher level of knowledge. This is *communion* between friends and lovers, between ourselves and our loving God. This is the language of the human heart in which love mysteriously speaks and makes the loved one present as a gift to the “other.” There can be no array of logical proof that will ever bring about such a communion. It is a surrendering love built upon faith (Orthodoxia) and hope in the one loved.

We can say that we human beings have been made by God to become “present” to the Trinitarian communitarian love and to each other by the love of God that is constantly being poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, as Saint Paul writes in Romans 5:5. We were made for love, for communion with God and the whole world in the unity of God’s Word. This is the great craving placed into our hearts by God. This, we could say, is the presence of God as uncreated energies of love, moving us by his Spirit toward greater and greater union with God and all of God’s creation.

Within and through the third millennium, we stand before God and shout out with rage our demands that he speak to us as we would wish him to speak. But all we hear in reply is the echo of our own self-centered musings. We have effectively lost the ability to recognize the voice of God as he speaks his Word to us in silence and love. We hear instead the insidious promptings of the demonic within us that, like a boa constrictor, wraps itself around our throats and suffocates us in a kind of living death. Such is the only silence most of us ever experience. It is the silence created by the absence of speech and the lack of true communication in love between us and God and all other human persons (the very meaning of “relationships”).

What ever happened to the Gospel message of Saint John 10:1-6 of Jesus’ parable, that was also written for us? “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up from another place, is a thief and a bandit. But he who enters by the

door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens the door, and the sheep hear his voice, and when he calls his own sheep by their names and brings them out. And when he has brought out his sheep, he goes before them; and his own sheep follow him, because they know his voice. The sheep do not follow a stranger, but they run away from him, because they do not know the voice of a stranger. Jesus spoke this parable to them; but they did not understand what he was telling them.” This revelation is for our ears and our hearts!

Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish philosopher, wrote about such genuine silence and the urgency on our part to attain it when he stated: “The present state of the world and the whole of life is diseased. If I were a doctor and were asked for my advice, I should reply: Create Silence! Bring men to silence. The Word of God cannot be heard in the noisy world of today. And even if it were blazoned forth with all the panoply of noise so that it could be heard in the midst of all the other noise, then it would no longer be the Word of God. Therefore, create silence.”

“Above all, love silence” (Saint Isaac of Syria).

In loving another, we become a gifted presence to that person. We wish to live in union, the true meaning of *communion*, with that person so as to be present as often and as intimate as possible, not only physically in space and time, but more importantly in the inner recesses of our consciousness. We are this way because God is this way in his essence as love (1 John 4:8).

THE TRINITARIAN COMMUNITY

God the Father, in absolute silence, in a communication of love impossible for us human beings to understand, speaks his one eternal Word through his Spirit of love. In that one Word, the Father is perfectly present, totally self-giving to his Son. “In him lives the fullness of divinity” (Colossians 2:9). But in his Spirit, the Father also hears his Word come back to him in a perfect, eternal “yes” of total surrendering love that is again the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is a reciprocal community of a movement of the Spirit of love between Father and Son. Our weak minds cannot fathom the peace and joy, the ardent excitement and exuberant self-surrender that flow in a reposeful motion between Father and Son through the silent Holy Spirit. God becomes real only because he can communicate in love through his Word. His Word gives him his identity as Father. But that means eternal self-giving to the Other, his Word in love, the Holy Spirit.

Whatever human words may be used to penetrate somewhat the inner mystery of God’s nature as love in a communion of persons, our attitude demands something of the *apophatic* approach. This is more than a negation of whatever we can positively assert through rational knowledge about the attributes of God. But the apophatic knowledge is knowledge given to us by the Holy Spirit that goes beyond all human knowledge; “To grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit. That Christ may dwell in your inner man by faith, and in your hearts by love, strengthening your understanding and your foundation, So that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the height and depth and length and breadth, And to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able by power to do for us more than anyone else, and to do for us more than we ask or think, according to his mighty power that works in us. Unto him be glory in his church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:16-21).

The Eastern Fathers learned well from Holy Scripture and from their own sense of brokenness in prayer that only God can lead us into the mystery of God’s nature as love. We must realize that we cannot comprehend God’s inner life completely or we would have to be

part of the family of God by our very nature. Yet Scripture insists that we can know this Trinity by “not knowing.” In our poverty and utter creatureliness, in our sinfulness and alienation from the heavenly Father, we realize that to know God is beyond our power. “No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (John 1:18).

Yet the Good News revealed by the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, is that we can come to know the Father through the Son: “And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). As we Christians grow in contemplation, we realize more and more that God must reveal himself to us. We can only wait in the desert of our nothingness, hoping to receive God as he wishes to make himself known to us. With the humility of children, we seek entrance into the heart of God as he communicates himself to his Word through his Spirit of love. This is the teaching of Jesus who speaks about the possibility of such children receiving, not merely knowledge or a communication, but the privilege in contemplation to enter into the very Trinitarian “communion.” I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children” (Matthew 11:25).

God’s Word incarnate, Jesus Christ, by his death and resurrection is now a living Word dwelling within us along with his Holy Spirit. He not only gives us the elements that constitute God’s inner life, but he makes it possible through his Spirit that those elements can also be experienced by us.

Thus this Trinitarian reality is to be experienced now. The doctrine of the Trinity is not only what makes Christianity uniquely different from all other religions, but it is a reality that effects the fulfillment of our very being as human persons. Christology and all other dogmas, Liturgy and the sacraments, preaching the Gospel and developing the Christian life of Christ-like virtues all have their meaning and subordination to this central teaching of the Trinity. We are baptized in the **NAME** of the Father, Son, and Spirit. We profess in faith that, even as infants, we were receiving God’s Trinitarian actions upon us. We are Chrismated, reconciled to God, ordained, married, healed in the **NAME** of the three divine persons (God’s **NAME** is God’s **PRESENCE**). We begin the celebration of the Divine Liturgy...Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy spirit, always now and unto the ages of ages! Amen! We bless ourselves in the Trinity and seek to do all for the glory of the Trinity. God revealed this mystery to us in order that he might humbly share the secret of his own intimate life with us. This reality is meant to be a living experience for us. We are to live in this teaching. But unfortunately for too many centuries the precisions of professional theologians dominated our approach to the Trinity. We in the West, were rooted more in Aristotelian philosophy than in Sacred Scripture. It is God’s living Word who alone can reveal to us this awesome reality and make it effective and transformative in our lives.

Karl Rahner laments that most Christians believe in a “monotheistic God” while they give a merely intellectual assent to the doctrine of the Trinity without truly experiencing the three divine persons in their one nature of love: “Despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere ‘monotheists.’ We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.”

THE RICHNESS OF THE GODHEAD

In God we see that silence is not opposed to words, but true Word-communication comes from the silence of the Spirit of love and continues to be spoken and lived out in the same

silence of the Spirit. Perhaps a good way to understand God's communicative silence is to study the classic Byzantine icon of the Trinity written by the Russian monk Andrei Rublev (c. 1408-25). [Through the prayers prayed over icons, the iconography of the Eastern Orthodox Church manifests presence and communion with God and neighbor].

This painting is a mystical vision, through harmony and relationship of colors and circular lines, of the inner Trinitarian life of movement and rest, peace and joy, a community of three persons in one nature. The Godhead is a nameless form which constantly feeds back through its circular movement from one person to the other two. In this icon we see three angels, the heavenly visitors to Abraham at the oak of Mambré (Genesis 18), depicting the three persons of the Trinity. The Father is shown as the angel on the left, as a figure subdued and retiring, suggesting the apophatic belief in the direct unknowability of the Father or the Godhead of the Trinity, except through the Son, who is the angelic figure in the center. He dominates the entire icon as he gazes lovingly at the Father while pointing his two fingers, symbolic of his two perfect natures, divine and human, toward the Eucharistic chalice on the white table before them.

The Holy Spirit is seen as the third angel, on the right, dressed in a green cloak, the sign of youth and fullness of powers and life. Before there are divine persons, in intercommunion with each other in expressed love, there is the Godhead. The Eastern Fathers begin with the Godhead, as the "unoriginated Source," the principal root of unity in the Trinity. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, the great fourth-century Greek theologian who wrote so eloquently about the Trinity, describes the Father as the source and goal of diversity or personal relationships within the Trinity: "The nature is one in three; it is God; but that which makes the unity is the Father, from whom and to whom the order of persons runs its course, not in such a way that the nature is confused, but that it is possessed without distinction of time or of will or of power."

This Godhead is the Abyss of silence. It is not nonbeing out of which comes the being of the three persons. It is God as "unnatured nature," to use Meister Eckhart's phrase. It is nonbeing for it contains all beings. It is *nowhere* for it cannot be contained in its wildness before it becomes tamed by love. It is the ocean before fish have been created. It is the air before birds have been made to fly. It is the fullness of the *Uncreated* before the spark ignites and hurls intelligence toward loving union. It is where total poverty meets infinite richness. It is *Infinite Zero* from which everyone and everything radiates and to which all lovingly return. Because of the Godhead's infinite richness, it cannot be classified in quantified numbers or in categories of being that have an origin of their being. The Godhead is beyond all being and yet is found in all being, including the Trinity and ourselves. Nietzsche once wrote: "One must possess a chaos within to give birth to a star." It is here that the Father becomes the Father of his Only-Begotten Son through the silent love of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father. Two looks devoured by love! It is here that we are led in silent adoration and contemplation of a knowing beyond our knowing. Human thoughts and concepts, human language and its words do an injustice in attempting to describe the awesome mystery of the One, Holy, Consubstantial and Undivided Trinity.

In silence we come into the *Void*. We enter into the dark cloud as did Moses. We merge with the darkness of the Godhead. No longer is God an "object" toward which we go in prayer to communicate in order to receive some "things." The ocean covers everything and does not need to become wet since all things are wet because of its complete covering of everything.

Like the crackling sound of a fiery spark that shoots through the rain-soaked heavens, a movement stirs within nonmovement. A light moves through darkness. Out of the void God stirs as personal Source, the Father, who wishes from all eternity to share his fullness of Being. The Mind wishes to think a thought, to speak a word, in order to know himself as the Begetter of the Word.

The Father moves the Godhead from pure repose and absolute silence to meaningful, loving motion, as he pours the fullness of his divinity into his Son (Colossians 2:9). What could we ever know, God's Word has revealed to us! God is a loving community, a family of loving persons, each person receiving his uniqueness by self-emptying gift of total self to the other in and through the gift of love itself, the Holy Spirit. For all humanity, the undreamed has happened!

It is an ecstatic, loving intimacy of the Father emptying himself into his Son through his Spirit of love. Such intimacy and self-emptying are returned by the Son's gifting himself back to the Father through the same Spirit. Jesus reveals that in the Trinity is the secret of life which unfolds in silence, the language of love. Love is a call to receive one's being in the intimate self-surrendering of the other. In the ecstasy of "standing outside" of oneself and becoming available through the gift of love to live for the other, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, all come into their unique personhood as distinct yet united persons (hypostasis).

The *I* is the child of the *We*, as Gabriel Marcel applies the mystery of true love in the Trinity and in our human love relationships. God as Trinity is the revelation that uniqueness of persons comes only from a family of two or more persons in love. In the very self-giving of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father a third Person has his unique *personhood*, the Holy Spirit. He proceeds, not as another Word, but from the silent love of the Father for the Son and the single, silent Word, the Son, surrendering to the Father. The Spirit is silent love, experienced, but not heard except in the soundlessness of love itself.

SILENCE IN THE TRINITY—THE "STILLPOINT" OF MERCIFUL LOVE

The awesome mystery of the Trinity, which is the beginning and the middle and the end of all reality, reveals to us a transcendent truth that should permeate our entire lives. Out of Absolute Silence the Godhead could not yet experience community. For an *I-Thou* relationship, bringing forth a *We*-community, could come only when the Father spoke in relative silence his Word. That *relative* silence we call the Holy Spirit, the binding, self-sacrificing love between the Father and the Son.

The Spirit is the cosmic bird that hovers over the chaos and the void. It stirs the *I* of the heavenly Father to perceive himself as one not isolated. The Spirit who is the Spirit of love, moves the heart of the Father, and the Son is begotten in the silent Word that the Father utters. The Father thrills to see himself imaged, as Mind discovers itself in the Word that issues from the Mind. But he thrills also to discover himself as the unique Father of his Son when the Son in the power of the silent Spirit utters his silent Yes in total self-surrender to the Father.

We—patterned on God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26)—project that image most often, not in the negative silence of chosen isolation and mutism, but in speech. But the words we speak must proceed from the same silent Spirit of love and return "home" to that Spirit. We move away from imaging God as he speaks his Word in the silent love of the Spirit when we fail to speak our words in God's love.

It is through God's Spirit of love that he has the name of "Father." His fatherhood is expressed in his silent, eternal self-giving to his Son. Saint Hilary of Poitiers insists that the Father and the Son have a perfect mutual relationship of Father and Son to each other. If the Father and Son mutually know themselves, this is brought about necessarily by the Holy Spirit, who allows them in silence, not only to affirm themselves as Father and Son, but mutually to recognize themselves as such.

From this threefold movement, therefore, all reality within the Trinity and outside in all of creation flows through the Trinity's uncreated energies of love. Such an "implosion" of love between Father and Son through the Spirit within the Trinity seemingly is not enough. Such

tremendous love within the Trinity, we learn only from Scripture, seeks to “explode” outside of its own community. God freely wishes to create new life that can share in the divine, ecstatic love within the Trinity.

We human beings know this to be our experience of an authentic *I-Thou* love relationship that stretches outward to share that love in new human love with another in the creation of new life. This is true because it is first true of God, the Source of all participated life and love. When we love one another, God’s love in us is being perfected (1 John 4:12).

It is only faith received through God’s revelation found in the Old and New Testaments that opens us to accept the Good News that the Trinitarian community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit moves outward freely to create a world of participated beauty. Yet of all God’s material creatures we human beings are gifted to be able to communicate with the Trinity by sharing in God’s very own nature (2 Peter 1:4). We are called in God’s gratuitous love to receive the divine, self-emptying love as self-gift of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Our calling is to enter into God’s primal silence and hear his Word of love, Jesus Christ, tell us at each moment of our earthly journey how great is his love. We are called to answer in the shared silence of the Word as we, with him, repeat our constant “Yes!” in total silence.

THE DIVINE ECONOMY

We see, therefore, that the ineffable mystery of the Trinity, that which escapes our own human comprehension, can, however, be known and experienced in and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. God not only deemed to reveal the truth of this mystery to us, but in that revelation he has made the mystery of the Trinity the beginning and end of all reality. God effects our fulfillment precisely in and through the activities of the triune God in the context of our history of salvation.

We come, not only to know, but also to experience the triune God within what Karl Rahner calls the biblical data about the “economic” Trinity. “Economia” (*oikonomia* in Greek) etymologically refers to the proper running of a household well. In theology it usually refers to any divine activity in relationship to creatures. Thus theologians speak of “the economy of salvation.” Among the Eastern Fathers *theology* properly so-called concerns itself with teaching about divine Being itself, namely, the Holy Trinity known in its relation to created beings. This belongs vitally to the realm of the economy of salvation.

Karl Rahner states very emphatically his principle that he maintains is the persistent teaching of the Eastern Fathers of the relationship of the Trinity toward us human beings made in God’s image in the history of salvation. “The ‘economic Trinity’ is the ‘immanent Trinity’ and the ‘immanent Trinity’ is the ‘economic Trinity.’” This means that the very relationships within the Trinity (immanent Trinity) are the same relationships of the Trinity in bring about God’s eternal plan of salvation.

In identifying the Trinity of the economy of salvation with the very life within the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Rahner seeks to recapture the fundamental teaching of the Eastern Fathers that the personalism of the three divine persons toward each other in their self-giving is similar to their self-giving relationships to us human beings. If this were not so, Rahner argues: “God would be the ‘giver,’ not the gift itself. He would ‘give himself’ only to the extent that he communicates a gift distant from himself.”

Upon this Eastern Christian teaching of the similarity between the immanent, Trinitarian “activities” and the “economic activities” hinges the answer to the question: Are we human beings so loved by God that we are able to be radically transformed by God’s very gift of himself by the Trinity’s very own transforming persons of Father, Son, and Spirit? If God

merely loves us to the degree that he gives us created gifts, we would never be truly saved from our sins and be regenerated into true children of God.

Crucial in this patristic doctrine is that through God's uncreated energies of love we actually do make contact with the living Trinity. God is truly love. The community of the Trinity wants to share its perfect and eternal love of self-giving within the Trinity with us human beings by transforming us into sharers of God's very own nature (2 Peter 1:4). Saint Irenaeus of the second century pictures God as coming toward us in the created world through his two hands: Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit: "And therefore throughout all time, man, having been molded at the beginning by the hands of God, that is, of the Son and the Spirit, is made after the image and likeness of God."

God is grace! He gives us this sharing in the Trinity's life through the uncreated energies that are the personalized, self-giving of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit to us. It is this moving of God's *We*-community toward us that gives us a share in the very life of the three persons that is at the heart of the Christian message and the chief purpose of Christ's incarnation, teaching, and death on the cross, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything, and remind you of everything which I tell you" (John 14:26).

It is for this reason that the Eastern Christian theologians, mystics that they were, always began with the first words of the book of Genesis: "In the beginning, God...." It is for this reason that we should be grounded firmly in the great mystery of the Holy Trinity since all our other relationships flow out of this mystery of the Trinity. In prayerful humility and a sense of our deep unworthiness to approach God in order to probe into *how* God communicates himself to us, we can turn to that intimate, Trinitarian union of love to which God calls us.

It is a path that leads us beyond idols and images, even beyond our objectivizing God as a Person to whom we can address ourselves as to another created being. It is a knowledge of experience that admits of an infinite growth because this knowledge surpasses all human understanding and becomes identified with true love. To know the Trinity in this sense of mystery is to love God through the Spirit of Jesus Christ as God loves us.

Saint Paul's statement in his letter to the Ephesians can serve to summarize in non-speculative, scriptural terms the movement of the divine *We*-community into our world in order to share with us human beings the same relationships enjoyed between Father and Son as I-Thou, brought together in perfect, loving union by the Spirit: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heaven through Christ; Just as from the beginning he has chosen us through him before the foundation of the world, that we may become holy and without blemish before him. And he marked us with his love to be his from the beginning, and adopted us to be sons through Jesus Christ, as it pleased his will. To the praise of the glory of his grace that he has poured upon us by his beloved one. In him we have salvation, and in his blood, forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of his grace. That that grace which has abounded in us, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. And made known to us the mystery of his will that he has ordained from the very beginning, to work through it; As a dispensation of the fullness of times, that all things might be made new in heaven and on earth through Christ, By whom we have been chosen, as he had marked us from the beginning so he wanted to carry out everything according to the good judgment of his will, That we should become the first to trust in Christ, to his honor and his glory. In whom, you also have heard the word of truth, which is the Gospel for your salvation; in him you have believed, so you are sealed with the Holy Spirit that was promised. Which is the pledge of our inheritance, for the salvation of those who are saved and for the glory of his honour" (Ephesians 1:3-14).

Glory and Adoration to the Holy, Consubstantial, Undivided, Life-Creating
Trinity...**FOREVER!**

Father John Michael Zboyovski