

Deacon Trish Harris

Trinity Sunday, 2021 (*while in formation; ordained 6/5/22, diocese of Western Michigan*)

O eternal Trinity, You are a deep sea in which the more I seek the more I find, And the more I find, the more I seek to know You. You fill us insatiably, because the soul - Before the abyss which You are – is always famished; and hungering for you, O eternal Trinity, it desires to behold truth in Your light.

~St. Catherine of Siena

Today is Trinity Sunday and that prayer from St. Catherine of Siena sets the tone for our exploration of the Trinity together this morning. We are so hungry for the goodness that the Trinity provides us. After a year long famine of sorts we are desperate for spiritual nourishment. We sometimes forget how to access the gifts of the Trinity. We get lost in our heads, attempting to dissect this holy body like it's a science project. We just want to get to the bottom of it: what does this all mean.... Father, Son & Holy Spirit?!

To keep us from starving, God reminds us that the Trinity is shrouded in mystery. In order to get the most delicious & nutritious bites we are invited into that mysterious space where concrete answers are not the goal, where we meet up with ephemeral energy that impacts our lives in dynamic ways. Welcome to this day dedicated to the mystery of God. I encourage you to sit back, relax and breathe in all the beauty around you while the Holy Trinity assists me in serving up some nourishment. Listen with the ear of your heart & feel how the Trinity: the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, might weave its way into your being.

In her extraordinary book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, the author, Robin Wall Kimmerer shares the profound wisdom of plants. Robin says, "plants speak in a tongue that every breathing thing can understand. Plants teach in a universal language: food." Robin introduces us to the Three Sisters. In Native American culture they talk about an exceptionally harsh winter where many people were dying from hunger. Robin writes, "Three beautiful women came to the homes of the people. One was a tall woman dressed all in yellow, with long flowing hair. The second wore green, and the third was robed in orange." Once the women were warm and safe they revealed their true identities – they were corn, beans, and squash. They offered the people a bundle of seeds so that they might never go hungry again.

For many Indigenous People in the Americas, the food trinity of Corn, Beans & Squash, also known as the Three Sisters are planted close together in a technique known as companion planting which celebrates the plants being interdependent on one another. The corn provides a structure for the beans to climb, the beans provide nitrogen to the soil for all of the plants and the squash is planted in-between the corn and the beans, blocking the sunlight and helping to prevent the growth of weeds. This vegetable trio sustained the Native Americans both physically and spiritually. In legend, the plants were a gift from the gods always to be **grown** together, **eaten** together and **celebrated** together. A holy balanced diet....

If it's been tricky for you to connect to the Trinity in this story, get ready to sit up straight. Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us of the power of relationship. She states, "Alone, a bean is just a vine, squash an oversize leaf. Only when standing together with corn does a whole emerge which transcends the Individual. The gifts of each are more fully expressed when they are nurtured together. In ripe ears and swelling fruit, they counsel us that all gifts are multiplied in relationship. **This** is how the world keeps going."

In our next story, Nicodemus is one of the central characters. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a well-trained Jew, and a leader to his people. He was **very** bright and highly curious....so, in the darkness of the night, Nicodemus found his way to Jesus, drawn to the mystery of who Jesus really was. On that night, Nicodemus was searching to believe something **more** about God; he came seeking answers. "Believe in

me....” that was Jesus’ invitation to Nicodemus that night. “Get out of your head, open up your soul, step outside of all your worldly notions. Be born anew.....alive.”

“How can this be?” Those are Nicodemus’ last words in this Gospel passage, which reveals Nicodemus’ vulnerability and makes him so relatable to us. Most of us are a lot like Nicodemus. We’re stuck on how to navigate through this world with all its demands and pressures. We hardly have the time and energy to wash the dishes. How are we supposed to begin to understand the Trinity? We can imagine Jesus saying something like this to Nicodemus: “Here is how to begin. Watch me.....put your hand right here. Release your mind of all worldly thoughts. Just do as I do. Believe me. Believe **in** me, for God so loved the world....”

We are left to wonder how Nicodemus felt when he left Jesus that night. Jesus had spoken something so strange and wonderful that Nicodemus’ mind was not able to fully take it in right at that moment. But, we have clues that Nicodemus left that meeting with Jesus inspired to let go of the narrow confines of a particular tradition and to wade into the deep waters of faith.

For our third and final story, we travel back 800 years ago, to the lush Rhineland valley. There we meet up with a woman of extraordinary spirit and courage: St. Hildegard of Bingen. Through all the turmoil of that period, St. Hildegard tapped into her creativity and combined it with her work of teaching, healing, organizing, reforming, and much more. St. Hildegard advocated for all of us to embrace the arts: music, literature, painting, dance and baking bread. She said that it is art that “wakes us from our sluggishness” and the only way to express our cosmic, spiritual experience is through art and creativity. In her first theological work, *Scivias*, St. Hildegard wrote about her experience of seeing the Holy Trinity in a vision. It is written, “Then I saw a bright light, and in this light, the figure of a man the color of a sapphire, which was all blazing with a gentle glowing fire. And that bright light bathed the whole of the glowing fire, and the glowing fire bathed the bright light; and the bright light and the glowing fire poured over the whole human figure, so that **the three were one light** in power of potential.” St. Hildegard was a true visionary, not only because of her mystical experiences, but also because she had a deep understanding about the way that art and music are connected to faith and enhance spiritual experiences.

Contemplative author, Carl McColman, shares more about St. Hildegard’s vision of the Trinity. He says, “It’s a circular, cyclical, Holy Trinity. Instead of the sharp, (and hyper-masculine) triangular Trinity, St. Hildegard offers a fluid, energetic, embedded, holistic Trinity. The circle is feminine, anchored in an understanding of the cosmos and time, related to inclusion. In short, a circular Trinity that features the male Christ, only immersed in the spherical energies of fire and light is a gender-balanced Trinity, an idea that is only now gaining even partial acceptance within the Christian community.”

God wants to be known intimately by each one of us and then for us to reflect God back to the world. We can connect with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through prayer, worship, and by loving one another deeply, generously and joyfully. The Trinity invites us to move outside of ourselves, to share our life, our love, and our creativity with others. May we allow the Holy Trinity to move us in that direction. Amen.