

Only God Knows God - Trinity Sunday, 2007

June 03, 2007

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

There is a story told of Brother Elric, a 12th Century Monk, who after completely botching a sermon on the Holy Trinity, took a vow of silence for the rest of his life. Brother Elric's inclination is not totally without merit. Why not just admit that *only God knows God* and declare the divine as simply our *Higher Power* and leave it at that. Why try to define the inexpressible? All of which brings us to what this day is about, *Trinity Sunday*; the celebration of a doctrine, rather than an historical event; the summation of our faith rather than the events upon which that faith is based.

We as Christians believe in a particular God and the particular God we believe in, or to be more precise, the particular doctrine of God which most Christians hold officially, is the most adequate answer we have for our need to know who and what God is. It is one thing to believe there is a God; it is something else to say *what* God is or is like, and yet this is what we are

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compelled to do if we are to find answers to the questions that come up in our lives whether we are children or adults. All religion starts with these questions. Christian doctrine is the body of answers we have inherited from our fore-bearers in the faith. The questions force themselves upon us in every generation, and compel us to find new answers if we are going to reject the old ones. I suggest to you that the old ones are still the best ones.

The first and most common question is where did it all, all meaning the universe, come from? And the answer which is emotionally most satisfying and scientifically not impossible, even in these high-tech times, is that all that exists is the work of an eternal and intelligent being, ineffably greater than any other being we can imagine, that it is indeed a Creation by a Creator, that there is a divine source for all that we see and know, a source whom we have not seen, yet can know in *what we have seen*. From our knowledge of

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this world and its wonders, we infer the fact of the God who made it all, and we call him *Father*, because human fatherhood at its very best is the closest parallel we have to what the act of creation must be and *despite not so subtle efforts to indicate otherwise*, the God who accounts for all that is, we call God the Father.

The second question is who was Jesus Christ? This question arises from the fact that at a known time in a known place, there lived one Jesus of Nazareth who both said and did things which have never been forgotten and which were so remarkable that they demand some explanation in terms of his identity. Even if we don't know what he said or did, or all of it, we do know of his existence and his influence on the course of history, so the question remains, *who was this?* The one answer which comes closest to fitting all the facts known about him is that he was a *divine* being, who was at the same time completely *human*,

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that in some sense he was God, in that he was God's Son, who uniquely shared the life and will of the heavenly Father and showed forth his nature in the world we inhabit.

The third question is, *how do we explain the continuing influence of the God made known in Jesus Christ through all these 2000+ years, for that influence has persisted?* There is a *Spirit*, which operates within us to give us *hope* when there is no hope, and *strength* when there is no strength left in us and *wisdom*, when our minds are blank and empty. This *Spirit* has been felt in *individual* lives, which have been seized by a power beyond themselves and changed and redirected and upheld. It has been felt by institutions, in spite of their natural conservatism which would hold them fast in old ways, so that knowledge has been increased, customs have been softened, justice has been more evenly dispensed and life in general made better and brought closer to the

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selfless standard set by Jesus himself. It has been felt in the life of the fellowship of believers we call the Church, where it has been renewed and redirected time and time again. This is the work of the promised ***Comforter, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit of God***, which brings God as close as our inmost thoughts and hopes.

So, we sing on this special feast day, ***Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, Blessed Trinity*** (Hymn 362). We baptize ***in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit***. We pray ***to the Father, through the Son, in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit***, because the Trinity is the uniquely Christian answer to ***who*** God is. The doctrine of the Trinity we proclaim is not a hair-splitting, religious mind- teaser to be figured out. It is the deepest mystery of the Divine to which we surrender our lives. The Being who created heaven and earth had become incarnate in a particular man named Jesus, and continued to dwell in their midst

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after his death, Resurrection and Ascension, leading, guiding, sustaining, and ***empowering*** them through the Holy Spirit.

By this time, perhaps, you think it might be well if I joined Brother Elrich in his silent seclusion. But, knowing all of this, is it going to be any easier for parents getting the kids off to school in the morning? Is it going to help us pay the bills or find a better job? Will it help a teacher figure out how to get a borderline student through finals? Will it help a lawyer win a case or a doctor heal a patient? The answer to all of those is ***possibly but not probably***. This doctrine is not a ***fix*** so much as it is a ***promise***, a promise of the ways in which we can know God and approach him if we want to. If we will ***claim*** this promise, we can make our very own all the fullness of the faith we profess.

AMEN.