

**Homily for a Parish Visit to
Saint Michael Parish, Greenfield
and
Saint Mary Parish, Fieldon
Trinity Sunday
June 14 and 15, 2014**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, it is a privilege for me to celebrate and preach at this Mass with you today. Usually when a bishop comes to a parish, it is a special occasion, like administering the Sacrament of Confirmation or celebrating a parish jubilee. I am not here for any of those reasons today. I am here for a regular Sunday Mass because I want at some time to visit every parish in our diocese, in order to get to know the people and the places that make up our Catholic community in central Illinois.

What does a bishop look for when he comes to a parish? Well, I didn't come to see if the floors were cleaned and the pews were polished! Though I must say, your church looks very nice! I take my cue from the Gospel passage where Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

First and foremost, when a bishop comes to a parish, he looks for the presence of the Catholic **faith**, to see whether it is strong and vibrant, whether it is growing, and if the conditions are present for its continued growth in the future. So it is good to see people of faith gathered here.

At the same time, a pastoral visit is not just a time for a bishop to see the parish, but also for the parish to see the bishop. The Church is all about relationships. As the three persons of the Trinity - which we celebrate today in a particular way - are an intimate communion of Father, Son and Spirit in relationship to each other, the Church exists as a communion in relationship to God and in relation to each other, the People of God, the Body of Christ. As a bishop, I have a special relationship with you, and you have a special relationship with me, and one of my roles is to bridge the relationship between you and the Pope and the rest of the universal Church, so that we may all be one in Christ's Body, into which we have been incorporated by the grace of Baptism.

As we celebrate today the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity it is fitting for us to consider how we fit into this relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Certainly we do fit in, as we were incorporated into this relationship at our baptism with water and the

invocation of the Trinitarian formula of the Father, Son and Spirit. We invoke that same Holy Trinity at the start and finish of every Mass and at the beginning and close of our prayers.

Trying to understand the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not easy. There is a famous story about Saint Augustine, one of the most profound theologians of all time. The story goes that Augustine was sitting on a beach, trying to grasp the mystery of the Trinity, when he saw a small boy with a seashell collecting water from the sea and pouring it into a hole in the sand, returning to the sea for more water, and so on. Distracted by this, St Augustine asked him, "What are you doing?" The child answered, "I'm going to pour the entire ocean into this hole." "That is impossible; the whole ocean will not fit in the hole you have made," said St Augustine. The boy replied, "And you cannot fit the Trinity into your tiny little brain."

The complexities of the theology of the Trinity will always be beyond the human mind in this life. That is not a cause for concern for us today, however, because we gather today to *celebrate* the Most Holy Trinity – not to *understand* it. Our entire liturgy is wrapped up in the Trinity – our prayer is addressed to God the Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, both of whom live and reign in unity with the Holy Spirit, one God, three persons. It

would be interesting to sift through the full liturgical texts for almost any occasion and examine just how often the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are mentioned: from the time we begin in the name of Father, Son and Spirit, to the blessing invoking the protection of Father, Son and Spirit at the end of Mass.

How, though, did we come to know about God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit? We know about God because He has told us about Himself. In fact, only God can reveal Himself to us. It happens in today's scripture readings. In Exodus, Moses carries the stone tablets of the Law, which tell us about God's ways, but only God can say, as He does here, "Lord, Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness." We can only learn this about God because He alone tells us; humans could never invent a god who is like this.

Saint Paul famously passed on to his readers and hearers what he himself had been told. This empowers him to wish for the Corinthians, as we heard at the conclusion of today's second reading, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." It was from God alone that Paul learned these divine qualities.

The fullest and most remarkable revelation of God comes from Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, who alone has come from heaven. Jesus tells us of God's purpose and plan for our world, and it follows from God's own revelation in Exodus of the God of tenderness and compassion, and is affirmed by Paul's statement that Jesus is graceful, God is full of love, and that in the Spirit alone we can have true and genuine fellowship. Jesus tells us what God wants for the world. It is not condemnation, because God sent his Son into the world so that the world could be saved; that is, that you and I can be saved! Jesus is God's plan for the world in action: he *is* the love of God, God's graciousness and the foundation of human fellowship in the Spirit.

This takes us back to our liturgy and our prayer. When we pray to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit, we are not just making a series of theological statements. We are actually immersing ourselves in the God whose Son tells us that God's desire is that all be saved and come to the knowledge of God's truth. Next time you say, "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," perhaps you might like to think that this familiar series of words is like a summary of how one God,

in three persons, invests so much in you so that you might have life to the full.

The fullest affirmation of God is simply that God is love. Love, relationship and community are at the root of the mystery of the Trinity. God loves us so much that, as the Creator, God made us in His own image. God loves us so much that God the Son became one of us to redeem us. God loves us so much that God the Holy Spirit remains with us to sanctify us.

Try to think of the most beautiful love relationship that you can imagine. That relationship does exist. It is the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The love of this Trinitarian relationship shared with us in baptism calls for us to share this love in our human relationships. The example of love shared between God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit also gives us a perfect example of fatherly love, very fitting for our celebration of Father's Day.

Family First, a national non-profit organization dedicated to fortifying families, suggests ten ways to be an "all pro Dad." They are:

1. Love your wife.
2. Spend time with your children.

3. Be a role model.
4. Understand and enjoy your children.
5. Show affection.
6. Secure your family's financial future.
7. Eat together as a family.
8. Discipline with a gentle spirit.
9. Pray and worship together.
10. Realize you're a father forever.¹

May your Father's Day be blessed, and as we approach Jesus in Holy Communion at this and at every Mass, may our gathering around this altar and our reception of the Eucharist strengthen us to live the demands of the Gospel and always fill us with an awareness of the grace and peace that comes to us from God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ See FamilyFirst.net and AllProDad.com.