

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Trinity Sunday; "Who is God? What is the Church?"

*Trinity Sunday*

*"Who is God? What is the Church?"*

*St. Joseph Parish; Martinsburg, West Virginia*

*June 16, 2019*

## **Introduction**

Allow me, first of all, to offer a word of warm thanks and appreciation for the wonderful leadership of your pastor, Fr. Gallagher! He leads this great parish of St. Joseph Parish with love, fidelity, & dedication, and with you, I would like to express our common debt of gratitude! Let's also acknowledge the priestly service of Fr. Manuel & Fr. Pucciarelli, as well as the service of our deacons, Deacon Pagano and Deacon Pressel.

Allow me also to offer a word of thanks to you, the parishioners of St. Joseph Parish. Since 1830, throughout its long and storied history, in good times and in difficult times, including the trauma of the Civil War, this parish has continued to grow as a community of faith, worship, and service, a community dedicated to spreading the Gospel, a spiritual home, a place of refuge, and a parish that excels in the ministry of Catholic education. For all that and so much more, I truly do thank you!

And to say the least, we are indeed going through some very difficult times, including and especially the turbulent week that has just concluded. For that reason, I wanted to be in the Diocese, to be with and among you, first and foremost to share the light of the Gospel on this Trinity Sunday, and in that light to see clearly my own responsibility in the current crisis as well as the path which leads us to reconciliation, wholeness, integrity, and peace.

## **The Light of the Gospel: Trinity Sunday**

And so, dear friends: All of us have been through personal crises of one sort or another – serious illnesses, financial hardship, the loss of loved ones, inner turmoil, betrayal by friends, or the hardship brought on by others’ wrongdoing. When we go through a personal crisis, especially if it drags on for a long time, it is easy for you and me to start questioning things we used to take for granted, including the trust we put in others and the values we held near and dear.

It’s not too much different with the long-drawn-out crisis of the Church, a crisis brought on by bishops and priests who gravely harmed the vulnerable and betrayed the sacred trust in which you have held them. As you know so well, this crisis has hit home here at St. Joseph’s, and indeed throughout the State of West Virginia as we struggle with the malfeasance of those who have led you, and that includes my own failings as your interim bishop. There is no excuse for any of this, apologies are inadequate, and while strenuous efforts are being made to prevent such things in the future, we find ourselves continually grappling with the aftermath. And for many, the aftermath of all this are deeper questions about their faith. Questions arise in our minds and hearts about our deepest beliefs: Who is God and where is God in this crisis? What really is the Church? What do I believe and why should I stay? ...

It is these very questions which are addressed in today’s celebration of the Trinity, the One God in Three Persons, the God who is love – a God who is real, personal, wise, and loving: The Father who eternally utters the Divine Word, his Son; and the Spirit who is the bond of love between Father and Son. Or, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it, “God Himself is an eternal exchange of love—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange” (CCC, No. 221). We know and believe in this fundamental truth because God’s Son became one of us and in the power of the Holy Spirit revealed the Father’s merciful heart. How consoled we should be by the simple yet profound truth that “God is love” and that “the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5).

What about the Church? Sometimes we see only its flawed organizational side, always in need of reform, but not often enough do we take time to look more deeply at what the Lord founded his Church to be and to become. In a nutshell, the Church is modeled on the Holy Trinity – Even as there are Three Persons, in One God, so too

with the Church: It is made up of many persons who, in Christ, become a holy people, “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (LG,4). That said, the Church has always been an unruly collection of saints and sinners, and its history is littered with those who have betrayed both the Lord’s love and their high calling. Throughout history and in our times, it remains, not a collection of prefabricated saints, but the place where sinners like me come to be redeemed, by being united with other believers and by being drawn into the pure love that exists in the heart of God. Through thick and thin, the Risen Lord remains with and in his Church, a Church created in the power of the Holy Spirit, to be that place, that means, that community by which we, as a people, share in the exchange of love that is at the heart of God. We share in this exchange of love when we welcome God’s Word into our hearts; when we are purified in the Sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation; when in the Eucharist we pray to become ‘one body, one spirit in Christ’; when, as a people we reconcile to one another and bring the love of Christ to others, especially those who are spiritually and materially impoverished.

### **The Path to Reconciliation, Wholeness, and Hope**

So, dear friends, reforms are utterly necessary in the life of the Church: procedures that hold bishops accountable; programs to protect young people; honesty about past and present failings; greater involvement of the laity in the life of the Church. All these and more are steps that the Church is taking and must take if we are to move, however haltingly, along the path of reform and renewal. Indeed, in my service as your interim bishop, as Apostolic Administrator, I have tried to make this interregnum less difficult for you but I acknowledge that some of my decisions thus far have not been the right ones. Renewal and reform is a difficult path and, I for one, sometimes stumble along that path.

Yet my own failings – and perhaps you feel the same about yours – my own failings prompt me to return, again and again, to the Fountainhead of mercy, to the infinite well of truth, love, goodness, and virtue in the heart of the Trinity. In standing humbly before the infinite mystery of One God in Three Persons, I find no excuses for my failings but I do find in this eternal exchange of love mercy, compassion, and divine light, an utterly necessary light, to guide my steps. I bear witness to the utter

necessity of God's Triune truth and love in my life in the hope of encouraging you to continue embracing his truth and love in your lives, and to point out that everything we need to do in the Church and for the Church will bear good fruit only if it originates in the wellspring of God love and if it finds its completion in that same wellspring. Let us not allow the evil one to unmoor us from the true and living God by separating us from one another and from the Body of Christ!

The time after Easter and Pentecost is called 'Ordinary Time' in the Church's calendar but I recognize that this is no ordinary time in the life of this Diocese. As I have said before, it may seem to be a very long Lent, but I hope you will see it instead more like the season of Advent, a time of expectation and hope as together we prepare to welcome a new bishop. But let our expectation and hope be anchored, not in any form of self-reliance but rather in "the Trinity of eternal glory", in that eternal exchange of love, into which you and I have been drawn by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. To the One True God, Three Persons, one in substance and equal in majesty, let our prayers of praise and adoration, our prayers of petition and repentance - arise! And may God bless us and keep us always in his love!