

Trinity: joined to the dance!

Some people call it “an idea feast”—with a slightly deprecating tone that makes the Solemnity of the Trinity seem somehow less worthy than all those other “non-idea” feasts. Positioned as it is on the first Sunday after Ordinary Time resumes, it risks being caught up in “feast fatigue.” We’ve just finished Easter’s fifty days; summer is in full swing; cottages are open and those with green thumbs are taking full advantage of the late Canadian spring to plant their gardens. Why should we bother with a feast devoted to a mystery that is so difficult to understand, that seems more mysterious than all the others, and that seems so far away from us?

There are several reasons to celebrate the Solemnity of the Trinity well. First, the Trinity isn’t an idea: the Trinity is the richest expression of the Christian experience of God. In the history of theological reflection the mystery of the Trinity has been clothed in heavy-duty theological terms—“hypostatic union,” “immanent and economic Trinity,” “*perichoresis*”—to name just a few. The philosophical underpinnings of these terms are tricky, and today few people possess the philosophical prowess necessary to work with these concepts. Yet Trinity is the foundational Christian experience of God: not just of Jesus, not just of the Holy Spirit, not just of the Creator individually, but of these three persons who share one nature.

Furthermore, Trinity is absolutely foundational to liturgy. In the liturgy, this experience of God comes alive. We begin our celebrations by marking ourselves with the sign of the cross and invoking the Trinity. We pray, “Through [Christ], with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, Almighty Father ...” United with Christ by baptism, filled with the unifying breath of their love, the Holy Spirit, the people of God give God glory. Our collect prayers are addressed to the Father, made through Christ, empowered by the Spirit. It is not our own initiative that brings us to prayer, but the Holy Spirit’s prompting. And we, who are members of the body of Christ, never pray alone, but always “in Christ.” Contrary to what many people believe, our liturgical prayer is addressed, not to Christ, but to

Let’s think of this feast as a recapitulation of everything that we have celebrated in the Easter Season: of the paschal mystery revealed by Christ’s cross and resurrection to be the heartbeat and lifeblood of God; of baptism that recreates us in Christ; of the Spirit’s indwelling that puts fire in our dance and peace in our hearts.

the Father. The liturgy is relentlessly Trinitarian.

This is only natural, because the Trinity is not a mystery outside of us, but a mystery in which we live. Imagine that: *a mystery within which we live*. When we were baptized, we were baptized “into the life of the Trinity.” An innocuous sounding phrase, another of those theological formulae that trip off our tongues so readily. Yet if we stop to ponder what this means, it reveals to us a reality so demanding and so awesome that it could make our hearts stop.

We, the members of the body of Christ, live in God. We are caught up in the dance of the total, constantly self-giving love that unites these three persons. No wonder John can write that those who live in love, live in God. We dance within the paschal movement of the Trinity, the self-emptying of each person to the other. The mystery we call paschal did not begin with Jesus: rather, in his living, dying and rising he definitively revealed to the world that the life of God is, has been and always will be completely paschal. To be God is to empty the divine self in love of the Other, to receive the Other in return, and to gather up all creation into this embrace of undying love.

We who have been grafted onto Christ live in this movement of God’s self-giving. As St. Augustine has remarked about the feast of the Ascension that we also celebrate during these days: “Out of compassion for us he descended from heaven, and although he ascended alone, we also ascend, because we are in him by grace. Thus, no one but Christ descended and no one but Christ ascended; not because there is no distinction between the head and the body, but because the body as a unity cannot be separated from the head.” United with Christ, we are called to live as Christ lives, to act as Christ acts. What an extraordinary dignity to live,

and to live up to! There is probably no ethic more demanding than this: by the mysterious workings of grace, we are caught up in the life of the Trinity. We live, move and have our being within God. No matter what we do—whether we paint a room, nurse a baby, fight a fire, work on our computer, make love, engage in ministry, keep vigil with someone who is dying, go on vacation—we do it in God. We can’t step outside of the dance. We may stumble, we may tromp on our Partner’s toes, we may lose the beat and completely botch the dance, but we are still part of it. Then we must let our Dance Partner grace our stumbling steps and bring us back into the movement of God’s life.

So when, on June 11, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Trinity, let’s not think for a moment that we are celebrating an idea. Rather, let’s think of this feast as a recapitulation of everything that we have celebrated in the Easter Season: of the paschal mystery revealed by Christ’s cross and resurrection to be the heartbeat and lifeblood of God; of baptism that recreates us in Christ; of the Spirit’s indwelling that puts fire in our dance and peace in our hearts. Let’s remember, as Moses asks the Israelites in the feast’s first reading, what God has done for us in the macro- and microcosm of history. Think of Trinity as a feast that celebrates a mystery that is about home: our home in God and God’s home in us. Let’s dance the dance that celebrates our oneness with God.



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Remembering Msgr. Fred McManus

Monsignor Frederick R. McManus, Professor Emeritus of the School of Canon Law and former Academic Vice President at The Catholic University of America died November 27, 2005, just after the March-April issue of *Celebrate!* had gone to press.

Ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Boston in 1947, he studied canon law at The Catholic University of America where he received his doctorate in 1954. After a brief stint at St. John's Seminary, Brighton, MA, he joined the faculty of Catholic University of America in 1958, where he rose through the academic ranks. In 1984 Msgr. McManus received the Papal Benemerenti Medal for his service to The Catholic University of America. He retired from his position as a tenured faculty member in September 1993, but continued to teach until 1997.

In addition to his expertise as a canonist, Msgr. McManus was well-known for his contributions to the liturgical renewal in the Catholic Church and to the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue. He served as consultor to the Pontifical Preparatory Commission on the Sacred Liturgy for the Second Vatican Council and was a peritus at Vatican II. He also was a consultor to the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy that resulted from the council. Even as he

continued to teach, Msgr. McManus also served a term of ten years as the Director of the Secretariat of the Committee on the Liturgy of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Msgr. McManus was also a member of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, the Consultation on Common Texts, and the English Language Liturgical Consultation. He also was a consultor to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and a member of the Catholic-Orthodox Bilateral Commission and the International Joint Commission for Catholic-Orthodox Theological Dialogue. Msgr. McManus authored eleven books and hundreds of scholarly and popular articles. He also served as editor of *The Jurist* for more than 40 years. In 2001, Msgr. McManus agreed to be interviewed for *Celebrate!*. The interview, "Liturgical translation before Liturgicam Authenticam," appears in the March-April 2002 issue, pages 21-24. *Celebrate!* asked Canadian liturgist Frank Henderson to share with readers his memories of Msgr. McManus:

SOME MEMORIES OF FRED MCMANUS

I knew and worked with Fred McManus when we were both members of the

Advisory Committee of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). He was a member from 1964 to 2000; I served from 1977 to 1987. This committee met for four or five days about once a year.

Previously I had known of his work and contributions as president of the Liturgical Conference, as professor of canon law at Catholic University of America, and as supervisor of many doctoral dissertations in the area of liturgy and canon law.

Fred knew just about everyone: members of the liturgical community in North America, canon lawyers, officials in Rome and Washington DC, bishops around the world. He appreciated how different church constituencies thought and how they might perceive proposed changes in liturgical texts.

Fred was a long-time proponent of a vernacular liturgy, which for him included how texts sounded and worked when spoken out loud. At committee meetings every text was tested by being spoken aloud; musical texts were sung by all. Punctuation had to work when texts were spoken—colons and semicolons were out, and so were adverbs and most adjectives—they either could not be spoken properly and consistently or impeded the flow of thought.

Fred was articulate but did not dominate discussion; he listened respectfully to others. He had a great sense of humor, but never made fun of anyone. He was thorough and serious in his work, but didn't waste time either.

A remarkable man: priest, liturgist, canon lawyer, scholar—may he rest in peace.

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