

## TRINITY SUNDAY

June 12, 2022

What a joy it is to be outdoors for Mass this morning. We are God's people gathered in God's cathedral. The trees and rocks and earth beneath us all proclaim God's presence. The birds above us sing God's praises. You never know when a wild turkey will cross our gathering, or a squirrel, rabbit and chipmunk, and, maybe, a deer to appear as well. And let us not forget the domesticated goats and chickens! Hidden from our eyes right now are many wild animals such as possums, groundhogs, skunks, coyotes and only God knows who else. Of course there are also planes and trains that make an appearance, traces of Homo sapiens and our work.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, outstanding theologian of our Catholic tradition, wrote that God speaks to us in two books: the book of the Scriptures and the book of nature. He would reject the claim of "Sola scriptura", that is only scripture. Thomas said that the beauty of the universe can make us drunk or in ecstasy. And he meant the universe, not just the earth, but all of God's grand creation.

Some people say that nature is their church. They are at peace in the outdoors. I have my own favorite places to walk, to sit, to contemplate. And I have gradually become aware of how I am related to all of God's creation. But I am also becoming aware that nature is not only therapeutic for me, which it is, but much more. Nature reveals to me who I am. And who God is too. Thomas said that if we want to know God, we must really know creation.

Our indigenous American people impart to us a love of nature that is not just sentimental but a basis of reality. Many of them, such as the Lenape, would pray to the Great Spirit and include "all our relations". All our relations include the animal world, the plant world, the rock world. All creation, from the great galaxies and black holes, to the smallest mite, is my relation. We should not call them "it" but "you"; they are subjects and not objects. Doesn't this make sense? Our children often come to it easily until they are corrected to see nature as things. Saint Patrick's Breastplate prayer rejoices in all the gifts of creation surrounding and supporting him. Saint Francis of Assisi called on Brother Sun and Sister Moon, and Brother Ass as well.

Nature can heal us and tell us who we are. It is not enough to admire and use creation. It is not enough to comprehend the workings of creation, to see through

the eyes of thought, technology and science. To relate to creation is to taste the underlying mystery, the connection with all that exists.

A few months ago I read a book called “Braiding Sweetgrass” by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Robin is a professor of environmental science at a New York University school. But she is also a member of one of our native peoples. She works to reconcile scientific accuracy with indigenous insights. She teaches the scientific, Latin names for plants but also helps students to sense the life of animals and plants and rocks, their relationship with us, and to treat them with respect. Nature is not an object to be used but a subject to know and to love.

What has all this to do with the Triune God? I am not really sure but it is surely easier to talk about nature than the Trinity. Or even to try to describe God who I realize is such a mystery beyond all our comprehension. But I learn from my friend, Thomas Aquinas, who understood that the more we understand creation, the more we understand God. And the reverse is true also. The deeper we experience God, the deeper we really know God’s creation.

The revelation that God is a three-fold God tells us relationship is the heart of reality, is the heart of our cosmos. It is the heart of our human family that shares this creation. All are one. There are many differences of gifts and cultures and species in the world but all are inter-connected as one.

The Triune God also tells us that love is the main force of the universe. If God were a solitary, God would not be love. If God were only two, this love would be exclusive and contained. But love is shared with the Spirit and, through the Spirit who in the beginning moved across the chaos of the first creation, love embraces all of us and shows us the way to being creatures, being human, being divine.

To sum it up, allow me to quote from Saint Patrick’s Breastplate:

For my shield this day I call:

A mighty power:

The Holy Trinity!

Affirming Threeness,

Confessing oneness,

In the making of all through love...

For my shield this day I call:

Heaven’s might,

Sun’s brightness,

Moon's whiteness,  
Fire's glory,  
Lightning's swiftness,  
Wind's wildness,  
Ocean's depth,  
Earth's solidity,  
Rock's immobility.

For my shield today I call:

A mighty power:  
The Holy Trinity!  
Affirming Threeness,  
Confessing oneness  
In the making of all –  
Through love ....

**Timothy J. Joyce, S.T.L., O.S.B.**