

THE PRODIGAL / Sun. May 30, 2010

Sermon: Trinity Sunday

Sermon by: Fr. Bill Wigmore

The first reading is from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.

It's the concluding words taken from Dr. Bob's story.

Unlike most of our crowd, I did not get over my craving for liquor much during the first two and a half years of abstinence. It was almost always with me. But at no time have I been anywhere near yielding.

I used to get terribly upset when I saw my friend drink and knew I could not; but I schooled myself to believe that though I once had the same privilege, I had abused it so frightfully that it was withdrawn.... If you think you are an atheist, an agnostic or a skeptic, or have any other form of intellectual pride which keeps you from accepting what is in this book, I feel sorry for you.

If you still think you are strong enough to beat the game alone, that is your affair. But if you really and truly want to quit drinking liquor (or using drugs) for good and all, and sincerely feel that you must have some help, we know that we have an answer for you. It never fails, if you go about it with one-half the zeal you have been in the habit of showing when you were getting another drink. Your Heavenly Father will never let you down!

The second reading tonight is a canticle taken from the Song of the Three Young Men.

Glory to you, Lord God of our fathers;

*** you are worthy of praise; glory to you.**

Glory to you for the radiance of your holy Name;

*** we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.**

Glory to you in the splendor of your temple;

*** on the throne of your majesty, glory to you.**

Glory to you, seated between the Cherubim;

*** we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.**

Glory to you, beholding the depths; *

in the high vault of heaven, glory to you.

Glory to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; *

we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

A reading from the Prophet Isaiah:

In the year that King Uzzi'ah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one called to another and said: "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.*" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with

smoke.

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven."

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

A reading from the Good News according to Matthew:

(When Jesus had risen from the dead, he said to the women who met him at the tomb,)

"Don't be afraid. Go tell my companions so they can leave for Galilee, where they will see me...."

The eleven disciples went up to the mountain in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go.

And when they saw him, they paid homage to him, but some of them doubted.

And Jesus approached them and spoke these words:

"You are to go and make followers of all peoples.

You are to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Teach them to observe everything that I commanded you.

I will be with you day in and day out as you will see, for as long as this world continues in its course."

Sermon: Well good evening & welcome once again. How's everyone doin' tonight?

- Next month, on June the 10th, AA's gonna celebrate its 75th birthday.
- **And I always thank God that I have that date forever etched in my memory–**
because that's also my wife's birthday –
and my life gets very unmanageable when I forget it!

But it's interesting that AA doesn't celebrate its birthday on the day Bill Wilson got sober; **instead,**
it celebrates it *some six months after that;*

on the day when Bill successfully carried the recovery message to another drunk in Akron, Ohio.

You see, prior to that date, Bill had tried sobering up *any number of drunks* in New York City.

He carried the message and he tried helping dozens of alcoholics –

- **But not one of them responded – at least, not for very long.**

But on June 10th 1935

a man who'd suffered **long & hard** had finally had enough.

Just like Bill, he was "sick & tired of being sick & tired" -

And so Dr. Robert Smith was willing to try what had to look
like **a very desperate "spiritual solution"**

for the alcohol problem that was close to killing him.

Dr. Bob said **YES** to Bill's simple formula of:

Putting his trust in God instead of in himself -

Of cleaning **his own house**

And then, **unselfishly,**

putting himself at the service of others.

- **“Love and service”** Bob later wrote:
- **“Love and service are our code.”**

And so from Bob’s saying *YES*,
there’ve come a succession of other *YESES* that have grown
& multiplied *geometrically so that now*
those of us in recovery number in the millions.

- And on *this Sunday* in the Church, **we celebrate** another man who said *YES* to God.
- It was **a YES** that somehow seems to have changed *everything*.
- Today is called **Trinity Sunday**.

It’s the day we pause and **try our best** to recognize
and to thank God for **the mystery of who God is** and how
(at least for Christians)

God chooses to make himself known to us.

- How he’s present to us **as Father, and Son and Spirit**.

Like our meditation hymn said earlier –

Tonight we celebrate God in three persons –

a Blessed, but sometimes mind-boggling, Trinity.

Now if you have any thoughts that I’m going to explain the
doctrine of the Trinity so we can all leave here fully enlightened
and understanding it completely – **you can forget that!**

- That ain’t gonna happen – **cause that can’t be done.**
- **God chooses to be a mystery** – a mystery that none of us can understand –
- But at the same time, God also chooses to be a mystery **that each and every one of us here can come to experience.**

There’s an old story told about Jesus and the very complicated
doctrine of the Trinity –
but only part of that story has ever made its way into the scripture.

It’s the one where Jesus said to his disciples,

- **“Who do men say that I am?”**

And his disciples answered and said,

“Well some say you are John the Baptist returned from the dead.

And others say you are one of the old prophets.”

Jesus answered and said, **“But what about you?”**

Who do you say that I am?”

And that’s when Peter stood up boldly and took the first shot at explaining the doctrine of the Trinity - **so Peter answered him:**

"Lord, thou art the Logos, the Word, and the Wisdom of God
existing in the Father as His *rationality*,
and then, *by an act of His will*, being generated,
in consideration of the various functions by which God is
related to his creation, but only on the fact that Scripture
speaks of a Father, and a Son, and a Holy Spirit,
each member of the Trinity being coequal with every other
member,
and each acting inseparably *with* and interpenetrating
every other member,
so there exists an economic subordination within God,
but yet causing no division within God which would
make his substance no longer simple."

And Jesus answered him, saying,

- "Peter, art thou smoking dope again?"
- Much like Jesus, our program advises us to *keep it simple*.

And you know, every time his disciples tried to complicate things - as they (like us) were prone to do -

Every time they tried to get Jesus to answer some *heady*,
theological question that was troubling them,
Jesus always did a very interesting thing.

Jesus just said to them, "Now, wait a minute, boys -
you're getting this thing all wrong."

And then *what he did* was he took a little child
and he stood that little child right in front of them -
and he said:

- "Now listen carefully to me:
- **Unless you become like one of these -**
- *Unless your mind and your heart become simple like the mind & the heart of this child -*
- *you'll never understand what I'm talking about.*

Like AA, Jesus recommended *a simple program for his hopelessly complicated disciples!*

Now when a little child is born into this world - it arrives here in a very simple and with a very *pure* state of mind -
You look at it and you see that it's virtually *aglow with God*.

And I know that's true because I now have two little granddaughters - they're ages 2 and 4 - and when I look at their faces and when I look deep into their eyes - I can see almost God.

Watch a young child like that for just a few minutes
and you'll begin to see all the wonder and all the excitement
that's there inside them.

Kids live in *the now* and until they're taught otherwise,
they're glowing with innocence and they're totally without shame.

They haven't yet learned all *the head-games* that our families, and our societies, and even our religions will soon load them down with.

Before long, people will say to them,

"Here, you can play with this," -
but don't ever let us catch you putting your hand down
there and playing with that!"

(And then they take our hands *off of some of the very best*
feelin' parts that God's given us!)

... **"And you can play with this kid!"** they'll say -
"But that one's the wrong color or the wrong religion
or they come from the wrong side of the tracks - **they're not like us.**"

And so as time goes by and as the lessons get more and more
complex and as we become more and more **rational**,
and less and less **in touch** with the divine spark within;

then, day-by-day, the little child inside us gradually shrivels up *and nearly dies*.

Slowly **but surely** we lose our sense of **wonder and mystery and awe** at the world God has created.

(And maybe we alcoholics & addicts tried to recapture some of that feeling
by looking for it in a bottle

or through some drug -

and that way worked for a while but in the end **it turned on us too**
and before we knew it, we nearly lost it all.)

- But we're here tonight because *one man never* lost it.
- *One man* got it right –
- He got his relationship right with God - and he held on to it *forever*.

Like a child, the scripture says:

Jesus was on *intimate terms* with God.

He called him *his Father – his Abba – his Papa*.

The people around him complained and they said,

“you can't have a relationship like that with God –

We're all sinners - we're people of unclean lips and God is

Holy! Holy! Holy!”

And Jesus said to them, “*That's true – but even more than God being holy,*

God's full of love and compassion for all of his children.”

If we can keep our concept of God simple - just like little children do – then we'll finally start to get our relationship with him right!

Now by the time we arrive here in these rooms,

we may actually have a leg up on the rest of the world,

cause in one sense, we're already ***well on our way*** to

becoming *like little children* again.

When we get here, we may have been relieved of some of those grown-up worries & burdens –

Things like: **a car payment**, or balancing a checkbook – **cause those things are usually long gone**.

And by now, **the “time outs”** they're giving us are at Del Valle and they're probably getting longer & longer.

And some of us are starting to be afraid of the dark

or starting to wet the bed again!

- *So take heart!*
- *You see, we're already half-way there.*

Now in tonight's lesson, we heard the *tail-end* of Matthew's long gospel.

And over the course of some 28 chapters, Matthew's made his

case showing how Jesus is *related to God* **and therefore**

how God is now related to us in a whole new way.

Matthew says that Jesus “**loved**” **starting from day one.**

And Jesus never stopped loving and never faltered in his love.

And for that God raised him from the dead - and seated him at his right hand.

So now, *as Matthew brings his gospel to a grand finale,*

Jesus is about to return to his Father –

But before he goes (the story says)

Jesus calls his closest friends back to Galilee.

He calls them back to some mountain *where Matthew says*

he's arranged to meet them.

The story goes on: They go to that mountain –

and it's after Jesus has died and it's after he's risen –

and there Jesus is standing right in front of them –

They fall down and they pay homage to him -

But then –

and here's the line I want us to catch:

Matthew says: “**But then: some of them doubted!**”

.... ***Some of them doubted? What the heck does that mean?***

What a strange line to put at the very end of your gospel.

These are the eleven guys who were closest to Jesus –

They're the ones *he shared the most with* **and the ones who knew him best** – *and what do we hear about them now?*

- **“Some of them doubted!”**

But if we can stay **with this** thought –

then I think maybe there's something *really wonderful* about this line – because *notice* that Matthew doesn't make a big deal over their doubting – **and apparently neither does Jesus.**

Instead the story says: Jesus hits 'em with Step 12

and he gives them what's known as *the Great Commission*:

“Go and baptize all people –

Go and do it / in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus doesn't say – “*Oh and, by the way, you guys who doubted me – please stay after class cause I've got some remedial assignments for you to do.*”

Jesus just sends the doubters off with the rest –

baptizing - and helping others --- and doubting as they go!

Over the last two thousand years, I believe we've done a truly terrible thing in the Church –

We've made **faith** all about **believing** – when faith isn't *really* about believing at all.

Faith is about doing!

Faith is about **doing** love and service.

Faith only asks us:

Are we acting in love the way Jesus acted in love?

- Are **love and service** becoming our code too?

On Trinity Sunday we pause and we try to get *some understanding*

– **however imperfect** – of how it is we can experience *God's love*
in our world.

Closest I can come to an understanding of Jesus and the Trinity would have to go something like this:

- Jesus said YES to God's love.
- Jesus said YES when he reached out to all those who were living on the edge of his own society –
- He said YES to the poor & to the outcasts –
- YES to the prisoners, & *to the lepers*, and to the prostitutes -
- He said YES to all the ones his very own religion called *untouchable* –
- *All the ones they looked down upon and called: “Un-holy, Un-holy, Un-holy!”*

He ate with them, and he healed them, and he loved them –

And he got the Romans and the religious leaders of his day damn good and mad at him for doing this.

- ***But still, Jesus kept saying YES.***

YES when he was arrested – *and when he was beaten*

YES when he was crucified – *and when he died.*

Jesus said YES to God so much and so often –

that when the people who experienced Jesus remembered him

– they couldn't quite see where **the person** of Jesus left off

and where the Father he loved so much **began.**

Somebody said to me recently –

I just can't believe that Jesus was actually “God.”

And that got me to thinking – **and I know that's always a danger** – but what I came up with was to tell that guy –

*“You know, it's really **OK** if you doubt that Jesus was God –
because you see,*

I don't think Jesus believed that he was God either.

As a matter of fact, Jesus so didn't believe that he was God –

that unlike the rest of us who try to play God – **Jesus never did.**

And because he was so humble, and because he was so child-

like in his relationship with his all loving-Father-God –

Then that same God was able to pour himself into Jesus' heart and into his spirit –
and he filled Jesus with himself more fully than he'd ever filled any man *before or since*.

- **And so that's what I think we're hearing in tonight's gospel.**
- That when the disciples *looked at Jesus* –
- they fell down and they paid him homage to him *because they saw the Father in him*.

But there's that *one last lesson* we need **to catch** from tonight's readings –
And that's, as addicts, know this: **Know that "doubt" will come.**

- Doubts will come that this program can really work for us –
- Doubts will come that we really are alcoholics or addicts *or that one little drink or drug is going to hurt us* –
- And we'll have our doubts about God – about this Father, Son and Holy Spirit stuff –
- It's good to remember some of his closest friends doubted all of this too;
- And good to remember that that didn't upset Jesus in the least.

His final words in the gospel sound to me pretty much like Dr. Bob's final words in the Big Book:

He says – don't worry about doubts *but instead*, when doubts come, put your faith **to work**:

"Get up and get out of yourself –

*Go and help the next poor, suffering one you meet
and carry the message of love and forgiveness to him –
its the very same message that was given to you*

and as you go & as you do that then you'll experience me –
*and it can be as Father
or as Son or as Holy Spirit;*

but no matter how it is with you - we'll be with you –

*We'll **be** with you, and we'll **stay** with you*

and we'll love you *now and forever* –

even till the end of time."

Now that's a helluva deal!

Three for the price of One.

Amen!