



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

Date: 6 June 2004 [Trinity Sunday 7:30 service]
Title: **"The Lens of Faith."**
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Isaiah 6:1-8
Second Reading Revelation 4:1-11
Gospel John 16:12-15

For all of the concern that we have about our church buildings, they do have a special purpose for us. They are the base of our ministry and our work. It's not that being a Christian demands bricks and mortar, of course, but having a place to worship can help us to focus on our worship and our identity.

Sometimes the symbolism of a church is dramatic. Many, like the great cathedrals of Europe, are built in the form of a cross, with transepts forming the arms. Others, like the great historical churches of the Philippines, are built as rectangular basilicas: the ancient Roman law court buildings, symbolizing our being in the throne room of our heavenly King. Some are filled with symbols and art that make a visit to them like visiting a religious encyclopedia. But sometimes the lessons of our church buildings can be very subtle.

If you visit Holy Trinity Church in the late afternoon, you will see something that is not visible during our morning services: sunlight coming through the stained glass windows. Because our ceiling is white, the rectangles of colored glass reflect beautifully, and move across the church as the sun sets. This is something you can't

appreciate in the morning to the same degree, and (significantly to what I am about to say), you can't see it from the outside.

The Church's experience of the doctrine Holy Trinity is like that. It is something that, from the outside, makes no sense. One god makes perfect sense. To some who look at the variety of the world, even having many gods seems logical. To take the idea of a single God and to subdivide that concept into three distinct but interrelated Persons is not an obvious or natural development. No wonder the Moslems in the Middle Ages used to say that Islam allowed three wives and one God while Christianity allowed only one wife, but had three gods!

The truth of the matter doesn't lie only in some plot by the Catholic Church to confuse and mislead the faithful (as the Iglesia ni Cristo claims), nor was it only medieval theologians trying to make the simplicity of God more complicated than it needed to be. No, in fact, the idea of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit came as the result of persons of prayer looking first at the Holy Scriptures and what they say about God and how God works, and then considering how to see those passages as part of a central and greater truth. I mentioned that these were people of prayer, because that is the key. One cannot understand anything about God just by reading books, even the Bible (believe it or not). Study must be accompanied by prayer: prayer to the Holy Spirit for the inspiration to understand.

Approaching virtually any doctrine taught by the Christian Church without prayer and humility is like trying to appreciate our colored windows from the outside. You can see that it is a window divided into panes of glass, but it just looks black. It is only inside the church that the colors and patterns can be appreciated: the fact that there are many different panels and a spectrum of hues that combine to make up those walls of glass that give such joy to the eye.

In a similar way, trying to understand what the Church means by calling God Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and by its brave but always incomplete attempts to work out the fine points of the relationship between those Persons- this can only be done from

within the Church: inside the body of Christians who see that God not only as the object of study, but as the subject of a relationship.

We get an insight into the inner workings of God when we are silent before Him in prayer, when we are active in our love of others, when we sing and pray and rejoice in His presence and just let ourselves "be" here to His glory. That doesn't mean that we have to write books on theology to explain God to others. It only means that we will come to know Him better, and to appreciate the facets of His being, which is community, love and relationship.

I invite you never to look at a stained glass window in the same way again. I invite you to look at God as the One who reveals Himself to you as you look at Him through the lens of the Community of Faith: your Church, God's people, God's family.

As we sang this morning in our first hymn:

"All laud we would render: O help us to see 'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee."