

Feast of the Trinity – June 16, 2019

I have received a number of emails asking why Pope Francis has changed the words of the Our Father, not all of it but the line “lead us not into temptation”, to be replaced with “do not let us fall into temptation.” This is only in relation to the Italian version of this prayer. The reason is because the translation we all use makes it sound as though God is the one who induces temptation, who opens the door to temptation. “I am the one who falls, God is not pushing me”, the Pope says. It is obviously crucial that none of us give the wrong image of God. This is why today’s feast of the Holy Trinity is so important. Yes, it may all sound very confusing, three persons one God, it is surrounded by mystery, but mystery does not mean we are left clueless, but rather our understanding of God is one of continual discovery. There is mystery about all of us. We discover more and more about ourselves the older we get. We discover more and more about each other the more willing and open we are to one another.

So often we make judgments about others from a distance, and then when we get to know them our judgments change for better or worse! Think about the people you thought you knew but didn’t, and how your opinion changed once you entered into some kind of a relationship with them. So often we go off other peoples’ opinions without finding out for ourselves. This can be true in our understanding and relationship with God. If I don’t believe Jesus is any more real than the Easter bunny, then I am probably not going to enter into a faith relationship with Jesus, it would be meaningless.

A presentation was recently given at a symposium by Michael Downey titled “Being Missionaries to our own children.” It is a very apt title, because I hear more and more parents and grandparents telling me that their children, grandchildren, have distanced themselves from the Church (or they believe the Church distanced herself from them, their lives and reality) and no longer are seen to have a relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Today many declare they are spiritual, but not religious. They believe in a higher power, principles, values, but do not have to add a name to those principles, values, higher order or power. Not to put a name to that higher power keeps ‘it’ at a distance and enable us to make our own mind up as to what we believe to be true and just, removing any kind of relationship.

Once you add a name to a higher power, or to what is true and just, you create a relationship and relationships require commitment, energy, and trust. We have a name and it is Jesus. Jesus is the one who opens the door for us to understand who God is. We would have very little to say about God if God had not embraced human life in Jesus Christ his Son.

We would not be able to fully understand or comprehend the true meaning or depth of forgiveness, mercy, justice, compassion, how connected we are to one another, especially to the least among us, without Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who invites us to call God, Abba, Father, Dad, and promises to be with us always through the gift, power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Yes, without knowing Jesus we would have a very distant or warped image of God, without knowing Jesus we would be even more inclined to create God in our own image and likeness rather than the other way around. We have many images of Jesus Christ, and each image can speak to us at different times in our lives, depending on what we are going through or what's happening around us. Christ is presented to us as shepherd, king, teacher, miracle-worker, bread of life, lamb of God, healer etc. etc.

Michael Downey in his talk believes the image of God which speaks to today's world flows from the beautiful hymn from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians (Chapter 2:6-11) the God who empties himself for our sake, who looks beyond who He (God) is, in order to focus on us, on what is good, true, beautiful and just for us. In the incarnation, God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ, one like us in all things but sin, is like a good mother or father, who are more concerned that their children are steered in the right direction, than they are of being acknowledged, recognized or thanked. God, like any parent, takes a huge risk in having children. To have children is to leave yourself painfully vulnerable, because you dethrone and empty yourself in the process. It opens you to the possibility of being taken for granted, misunderstood, rejected. Of being willing and able to let go, rather than always having to be in control. This is surely what we love about our God.

We do not believe in a God who wants to control us, to control every aspect of who we are, what we do, and what happens to us (some people long for such a God). No, we believe in a God of invitation, who invites us to "Come and See", to follow him. It is not a God of coercion, you cannot force someone to love you or follow you, we believe in a God of invitation, who invites you into relationship. And if you accept the invitation be prepared for a roller coaster ride of sacrificial love, a roller coaster more crazy than any at Busch Gardens, but one which will carry you through all the ups and downs, bumps, twists, turns, and backward slides of life to the glory of heaven.

Father Ronald Rolheiser writes: "When a mother or father sits down at table with the family, she or he doesn't need, want, nor expect, to be the center of attention, a prerogative that a healthy adult generally cedes to the kids.

What she or he does need and want is that the family be happy, respect each other, respect the ethos and aesthetics that the family gives value to, and that everyone is essentially on the right track in his or her life so that each family member knows what is ultimately sacred, moral and important, even if a given member doesn't at this particular moment, recognize or credit the family for what he or she has been given to prepare him or her for life and happiness. This is even more true of God, whose love, understanding and patience are beyond our own and who, like any good parent, does not demand to be always the center of our conscious attention."

God, as we see in Jesus Christ, through the love of the Holy Spirit, is concerned about us, and wants us to know what is sacred, moral and essential for life and happiness. And because we discover this in our God as Father, Son and Spirit our natural response is to say, 'thank you', the very reason we are here today, gathered around this table, this altar. When we present God to others, especially to our children, those under our care, and to those who do not know who God actually is, we should always begin by stating what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. We speak about the Cross, Resurrection, Eternal Life, Healing and Forgiveness, Compassion and Mercy. And in sharing what God has done, and is doing for us, we invite them into relationship, friendship, and intimacy with this beautiful God, Creator and Life Giver, whom we are privileged to call Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the One who can never lead us into temptation, but only into love. Amen!