

SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH + YORKVILLE

May 26, 2024 (Feast of the Most Holy Trinity)

Newsletter no. 219

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, otherwise known simply as Trinity Sunday. Despite the great mystery that it acknowledges, it is a relatively recent feast and only dates to the beginning of the fourteenth century, when Pope John XXII (1316-1334) declared that it was to be observed by the whole Church on the Sunday after Pentecost. Until then it was generally thought inappropriate to set aside a special day in honor of the Trinity, because all of the Church's prayer is ultimately directed to the Trinity, in particular the great prayer which is the Mass. However, the strong devotion to the Trinity that characterized much of the Middle Ages overcame any reluctance that there may have been at the time about establishing a Trinitarian feast.

Although each of the three divine persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is mentioned in various places in the New Testament, the word “trinity” is not to be found in the Bible. It dates to the fourth quarter of the second century, when Theophilus of Antioch, who died around the year 185, used the Greek equivalent, *trias*, in reference to the three persons. The Latin word *trinitas* appeared soon after for the first time in the writings of Tertullian, an important theologian of the late second and early third century. The English word “trinity,” like the Latin, is a combination of the terms for “three” and “unity”—meaning three distinct entities subsisting in a single entity. Ever since then, this is the word that has been used to refer to the three divine persons who subsist in the single divine being who is God.

There was no precedent in human history for understanding God as a trinity, as one God in three persons. The gentiles—that is, non-Jews or pagans—practiced polytheism, which meant believing in many gods, some of which were superior to others, like Zeus among the Greeks and Jupiter among the Romans. The Jews, on the other hand, practiced a monotheism—believing solely in one God—which did not allow for the possibility that that one God would be anything other than one person. As it says emphatically in the Old Testament: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deuteronomy 6:4). For orthodox Jews, whose guiding text is the Old Testament, a trinitarian God is totally un-scriptural.

In their quest to elaborate a concept of God derived from a relatively few passages in the New Testament, the Church's earliest theologians saw that they had two major tasks—to affirm God's oneness and to explain God's threeness. In so doing they had to avoid two great temptations. The first temptation was to say that God was a single person who simply manifested himself in three different ways, sometimes as Father, sometimes as Son, and sometimes as Spirit. This came to be called modalism, meaning that the one God took on three different modes, depending on the circumstances. Modalism was nothing less than a denial of God's threeness. The other great temptation was to assert that, although there were three individual divine persons, only one of them could be completely divine—namely, the Father; the Son was a lesser divinity, and the Spirit still less than that. This position affirmed God's threeness at the expense of his oneness, since not all three persons partook of God's one divine essence to the same degree, and it is called subordinationism, meaning that the Son is subordinate to the Father and the Spirit to the Son.

Had we not learned otherwise, we ourselves might be modalists or subordinationists, because both modalism and subordinationism seem like such sensible, reasonable ways of explaining the Trinity. But as Christians we believe in one God in three persons, each of whom is completely God, without there being three gods. (A belief in three gods, which is called tritheism, has not been a real temptation for Christians.) The only differences among the three persons is that one is Father, one is Son, and one is Spirit. This is the inexplicable mystery that we contemplate in a special way on Trinity Sunday.

This Monday, May 27th, is Memorial Day, a federal holiday. In observance of the holiday the church will be closed soon after the 12:15 Mass, and the rectory will be closed all day and will reopen on Tuesday the 28th.

When I was growing up, Memorial Day was observed on May 30th, regardless of what day of the week it fell on. Some of us will remember that it used to be called Decoration Day, because it was customary to decorate veterans' graves then. Since 1971 it has officially been called Memorial Day, and now it falls on the final Monday of May. The patriotism and gratitude that marked the setting aside of a day to decorate veterans' graves seems to have yielded to the rather less patriotic urge to lengthen the weekend.

Father Boniface

Mass intentions for the period from May 25th to June 2nd

Saturday-Sunday, May 25th-26th (Feast of the Most Holy Trinity)

4:00 pm: Donald Dunne, Jr. (D)
8:00 am: Angela and Dennis Bartholomeusz (D)
10:00 am: Yaneth Marmolejo (D)
12:00 noon: Fergus O'Tighearnaigh (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Etel Usztoke (D)
6:00 pm: St. Joseph's Parishioners

Monday, May 27th (Memorial Day)

7:00 am:
12:15:

Tuesday, May 28th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm:

Wednesday, May 29th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Luke P. LaValle, Jr. (D)

Thursday, May 30th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Luke P. LaValle, Jr. (D)

Friday, May 31st

7:00 am:
12:15 pm:

Saturday, June 1st

8:00 am: Loraine and Andrew O'Neill (L), Birthdays
12:15 pm: Duane Gregory (D)
4:00 pm: Jimmy Quinn (D)

Sunday, June 2nd (The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ; Corpus Christi)

8:00 am: Megan, Matt, Sarah and Ryan (L)
10:00 am (German): St. Joseph's Parishioners
12:00 noon: Anthony DeClemente (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Maria Takacs (D)
6:00 pm: Deb Marinelli (L)