

Those who make time to come to Church on a beautiful summer day when the obligation to attend remains lifted are the very ones who seek to know and see the “face of God” in the person of our Father. Today, we come face to face with the mystery of the Trinity, a community of persons known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even the earliest and greatest thinkers in the Church knew that they were face to face with a reality impossible to penetrate.

St. Hilary of Poitiers, 4th c. French convert and scholar, once remarked that thinking about God begins when one “stands before the certain reality” that is God.¹ But here’s the catch...the only way to stand before God is in humble adoration. St. Hilary was thrust into the role as bishop just at the time the debate about the Trinity was heating up.

But at heart, he was as practical as he was bright. St. Hilary used the image of a book. The careful reader of a book realizes that he will not understand what is written if he does not expect more from the book than he himself brings to it. That is, we must stretch our thoughts so that they become worthy of the God whom we seek.

While cannot comprehend God’s *essence*, we are able to participate in God’s love that reaches out to all. God was too holy to be named in the Old Testament. Christ teaches a simpler name, “our Father.” In the Old Testament, the term *father* appears only occasionally as a name for God, while it is used by Jesus 170 times in the New Testament.

We now have a name, but even more than that. We have a relationship. God is now our father. His very name implies a relationship with us. As the psalmist says (Ps104:5) “Seek His face always,” referring to the Father.

¹St. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity*, 12.24; 1:18

In his attempt to write of the Trinity, St. Augustine could add to the psalmist this sentiment: “*Seek His Face always with ardent desire.*”²”

King David is not speaking in his psalm about knowing God as we know other things, but about intimacy with God, delight in God, loving God, knowing even as one is known. There can be no finding without a change in the seeker. Are we ready to change when we set out to seek His face?

We must ask ourselves if we truly see the face of God in others or only in the beauty of our June full moon tonight, in art or architecture, or in silent prayer in our room? If only in the latter, then we have a problem. We are called to see the face of God in every single person, regardless of race, class or social status. We seek God’s face in the stranger whom we greet, in the frazzled single parent struggling to balance family and job.

We strive to see God in the grocery store attendant, obviously stressed from working long hours; in the face of the doctors and nurses who have put in more overtime in the past two months than they have in two years.

Do we see God’s face in the person who does not dress like us or worships differently or not at all; in the police officer, in the National Guard citizen soldier called to protect us, in the person holding the sign at the exit ramp? Too often, I’ll admit, I see God in that which to me is known, is comfortable and reassuring. These unprecedented times call for us to reassess and re-commit ourselves to go outside our comfort zone.

The Church’s doctrine on the Trinity, while complicated and filled with historical clarifications and definitions, is perhaps best summed up as a “community of persons.” At least, that is surely the image that speaks most powerfully to me. A community of persons united in and by love.

² St. Augustine, *The Trinity* 15.28.51 *quaeram faciem tuam semper ardentem.*

Our Catechism picks up on this image by noting: “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.”³

In his *Confessions*, Augustine employed an analogy about the human person, recognizing that we (a) are that (b) we know and (c) that we exercise will. We **are**, we **know** and we **will**.⁴ Thus, in a unity of the human person, one also can perceive a certain “three-ness.”

In these dark days in our society, the love present in and among the three persons of the Holy Trinity provides a valuable lesson. As we come to know the God whom we seek, our finding will only lead to more seeking, and we will grow deeper and deeper in our relationship with the Mystery. May we be drawn more and more into relationship with our loving Father, and desire ever more deeply to continue to seek His face.

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2205.

⁴ Cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions* Book XIII, chapter 11. “I speak of these three: to be, to know, and to will. For I am, and I know, and I will: I am a knowing and a willing being, and I know that I am and that I will, and I will to be and to know. Therefore, in these three, let him who can do so perceive how inseparable a life there is, one life and one mind and one essence, and finally how inseparable a distinction there is, and yet there is a distinction.”