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Trinity Sunday

“Other, Other, Other”

In Isaiah , chapter 6 the words in English say “Holy, Holy, Holy” and from this passage comes that part of our worship called The Sanctus, said during our Eucharist and truly the high point of our worship Sunday by Sunday. But the truest meaning of this English translation is “Other, Other, Other” and on this Trinity Sunday these words ring true. For Father, Son and Holy Spirit are ‘other’ than our humanity and yet to struggle with understanding this formulation of our faith is to know our truest humanity. We worship not three almighties, but One Almighty who in diverse ways is made known to us.

It is the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Paraclete, who forms and shapes Christian community. Two passages inform us in these ways. Jesus says that the Advocate will “*remind you of all that I have said to you.*” (John 14:26) This passage will point both to the connection between what Jesus said and what the Advocate will say and to the nature of the Advocate’s teaching role. There is a connection here to the Old Testament and Jesus’ following in that model of God’s ways. The work of the Advocate is grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures in the witness of God’s Spirit through the prophets. The Advocate is to remind the community of what Jesus himself said and what he has said finds its origins in an earlier word. Now this Spirit was to remain present --- not just within leaders on specific occasions for a particular purpose --- but continually, within all faithful believers in Christ. There is a second saying of Jesus from today’s reading in which Jesus says, “*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*” (Jn. 16:12-13) This pointer is to the importance of fresh encounters with the words of Jesus, given at the time of need, not in advance of that time, and identifies the Paraclete as the medium of those encounters. The Advocate would not bring anything new to them. Rather, the Spirit would enable them to understand more fully what Jesus had already given them, and in so doing, give glory to God. Here the Spirit is a teacher who reveals what Jesus has already made known. As they encounter new situations, the Spirit will aid them in applying the message of Jesus to these circumstances. As the Spirit enables them more fully to understand what Jesus has already given them, they will bring glory to Christ.

These ways are pivotal for our understanding today that we may know the ways the Advocate enables past, present and future to converge in the life of the church. Jesus words resound in fresh ways in ever changing circumstances. The Holy Trinity, through the Advocate, plays the role of **conserving**. We are enabled at any time in the life of the church to reach back to the teachings of Jesus and “remember”, to bring Jesus’ teachings to life afresh with new understanding. On the other hand the Advocate’s role as teacher is also **creative**. Jesus word is able, through the Advocate, to move forward from its moment in history to the present life of the church. The Advocate makes Jesus’ word clear and meaningful for our day in this fast paced world of ours.

Jesus message, through the power of the Advocate, the continuing Word of God through Christ, is always fresh and alive just as it was when spoken by Our Savior. When

major events take place in the lives of human beings or institutions the words of Jesus beforehand would be less understood than these same words will be after the fact. Try to tell an adolescent what life will bring at 30, 50 or 70 and how Jesus' word will speak to their need. Talk about a blank stare. The words of Jesus that the community needs to hear to make sense of the church's place in changing social and economic circumstances are likewise unbearable in advance, because there is no context for such words in advance of the situation of need. BUT the Advocate is seen in John's Gospel as the guarantee that the words of Jesus will always be available as fresh words for any and all futures.

"Holy, Holy, Holy" (Other, Other, Other) lets us know at some level that there is always communication between Jesus and our modern community of faith. Isaiah first speaks of "God with Us", Immanuel, the One who is to come. That same Isaiah had said "Here I am, send me" to the call of God. That lively word continues today as we come to share in it and hear it anew. Yes, the word is conserved by the Spirit and is ever creative by the same Spirit. The Advocate's teaching, witness, and interpretation can take many forms in the life of the faith community. The entire telling of the narrative known as The Gospel of John is a powerful word from the Spirit who lives today but ever holds onto the earlier Godly word of Exodus and return from Exile. It conserves and yet carries us into the present. This reminding, most importantly, places the story of Jesus into conversation with the circumstances in which you live today, so you hear Jesus' words as if he were speaking to your own lives and needs. The "Holy" story is both a past event and a contemporary story. The Fourth Evangelist understands, perhaps better than any other evangelist, that story and interpretation, history and theology, are inseparably linked in the life of Jesus and the church and that it is incumbent upon the faith community to engage in disciplined conversation between the story of Jesus and your own story.

Every time the preacher stands up in front of you to proclaim the Word of God in a new circumstance he shares in the work of the Advocate and the long history of faith. The past, present and future is carried on by the preacher through the life of the church. Preaching is both conserving and creative in its work. It is old and new; past tense and contemporary. The preacher is bound both to the traditions of the church, so that his work is an act of reminding, and to the present moment, so that his work is also an act of discovering how the Word of God speaks in a new day. It will be a consistent speaking if done well. You will recognize it as something you have heard before. The Advocate in its presence among us here allows both preacher and congregation to share in a fresh experience of the Word of God. The Trinity is understood, not explained, in this way.