

The Inclusive Community

Trinity Sunday

June 7, 2009

Homily of Anthony T. Padovano

What Does It Mean to be Human?

John 3:1-17

The feast is Trinity Sunday but the text is as much about defining us as it is about describing God.

Nicodemus is the stand-in for our conventional selves. He is a seeking, searching, individual who restlessly cannot end his day and comes to find Jesus by night. He is troubled. Life does not seem to have gone the way he expected or wanted. Jesus seems to know something, to be someone who might understand this. So, he visits him.

The conversation gets right to the point. Nicodemus observes that Jesus has done and said some extraordinary things. That kind of wisdom, those kinds of miracles must come from God. Tell me about God.

Jesus says that maybe we should talk first about human life. What are its parameters and its boundaries?

For Nicodemus, life is something you study, codify, control, predict.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that life is like the wind. You never get it down, hold it in place, take it where you think it should be. We do not even know what it is like to be born. We know next to nothing about the very life we are living

Maybe, Jesus goes on, you ought to believe in what you were given rather than where you want to take it. You were given life. Believe in the gift of it. You had nothing to do with it. You came seemingly from nothing, from nowhere, from everywhere. You came like the wind. Your parents did not make you; they received you. You are not theirs or yours. You came from above. You are a mystery to be lived. Not a problem to be solved. Not a task to be done. Not an answer to be found. A gift. From above. Do you ever think of this?

Nicodemus stays literal. We are not that free. We get born once. We age. We do not get second chances, second births.

You get them every time, Jesus says. Whatever made you from above never stops making you. Stop being so literal. Your physical birth gave you life but did not define it or limit it.

What does it mean to be alive? It means that you received a gift, the gift of life that has fewer boundaries and limits than we imagine. You are a free spirit, Nicodemus. God never stops giving you freedom, life, second chances, new births. You are not defined by the earth but by the wind, not limited by birth, but given endless freedom. Connect with what is above you and you will come to understand this.

Even God is not one thing or somewhere or someone. God is everything, everywhere, everyone.

We are told by dramatists that if you have one or two people on stage, you are limited. Once we add a third character, a drama has endless possibilities. It is inexhaustible. The journey from one or two characters to three is quite different. We go from zero or a few to infinity.

If the universe were one or two things it would be limited. It is really limitless. It is everything in motion.

So God is a three- person cosmic play. Limitless. Inexhaustible. Since we came from above, from God, so are we. The universe which came from God is endless, unpredictable, a gift, a mystery, a source of cosmic freedom, a black hole or a star, an atom or a planet, a galaxy or just space and gravity. We are as endless as that. The sons and daughters of the stars. The inheritors of the wind and the heirs of time and inexhaustible energy. We are God's children.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that you do not get all this by study or by personal effort. You accept the gift of life. You give yourself to it. Like the wind, it takes you everywhere. You live your life. You do not manage it. Life is a dance. A dancer is never still. Never just one thing. Neither are you, Nicodemus! Neither are we, my friends.