

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity – Cycle B
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – May 27, 2018
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If you ask someone from Southern Louisiana to name the members of the Holy Trinity, you are just as likely to hear “celery, onion and bell pepper,” as you are “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” It is not that Louisianans aren’t religious, mind you. I think every child south of I-10 is born with a rosary in one hand. It is just that they are also born with a wooden spoon in the other. Everyone in Southern Louisiana cooks, it seems, and “Holy Trinity” is the name that has been given to those three essential ingredients to Cajun and Creole cuisine. Celery, onion and bell pepper appear in almost every savory dish – usually chopped and sautéed together in equal parts. Rarely would you find one ingredient without the other two. Perhaps unintentionally, this “Holy Trinity” of Cajun cooking tells us two important things about the real Holy Trinity – namely that in any human life, God is essential and that the members of the Trinity rarely show up alone.

Our first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy reminds us of the power and majesty of God. Having led the people of Israel out of slavery, Moses is giving them final instructions before they set foot into the Promised Land. Here, at last, is a free nation about to realize its dream of a homeland – surely, after forty years in the desert, after almost starving and being fed by the Lord with manna, surely they know how great God is, how far he has taken them! Well, that’s Moses’ point, isn’t it? It was easy for the Israelites to call out to God from their slavery, to remember their dependence on God in the desert – he was their only hope. But now, as their freedom and security are about to be realized, now that life is about to get easier for them – well, that also makes it easier to forget God. That’s human nature, isn’t it? When times are good, when it looks like everything is going as planned, when it seems that our hard work is paying off – well, that’s when we start to take credit. We pat ourselves on the back and tell ourselves how good we are rather than how good God has been to us. We begin to see health and wealth and security as the fruits of our labor rather than as the unmerited blessings of God. Moses is warning Israel, warning us against this complacency, this self-centeredness. We will be tempted to worship other gods – wealth or power, for example. We will be tempted to forget what God has done for us when our daily bread seems to come from the sweat of our brow rather than from heaven as manna. And so Moses says: “This is why you must now know, and fix in your heart, that the Lord is God in the heavens above and on earth below, and that there is no other.” In other words, God is essential. No human can ever possibly be happy without God. We can be comfortable, we can be prosperous, we can be

sensually satisfied, but we can never be happy without God. God is essential – our essence as human beings comes from being created in his image and likeness. We can only be happy when we embrace his image, not when we distort it.

Yes, God is essential – but this is Trinity Sunday when we celebrate the union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and that's the other lesson we can learn from celery, onion and bell pepper – the Trinity is inseparable. Where one person is found, the others are there as well. In our second reading, St. Paul tells the Romans that we have “received a Spirit of adoption through whom we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’” It is through the Holy Spirit that we are welcomed into the inseparable community, the family of God – “joint heirs with Christ,” as Paul puts it. Our role as a disciple of Christ, therefore, is not separate from our role as a child of the Father or as a temple of the Holy Spirit – all of these images are meant to remind us that through baptism we are intimately connected to the one true God – to Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Each relationship informs and enriches our faith. Through the mystery of the Trinity, we can relate to God as a loving parent, as a brother and friend, as the force of love itself. At various moments in our lives, one of these relationships may seem more important than another. There are times, I suspect, when we need the comfort of a parent, when we need to talk to a friend in prayer, when we need to feel surrounded by love. Yet none of these divine persons – Father, Son or Holy Spirit – is exclusively God. All of them balance and sustain and enrich one another. We experience the love of God in a more profound way because we can relate to the depth of the Father's love for the Son, of the Son's love for the Father – a love which is truly God's Spirit. One God in Three Persons gives us a richness, a flavor, a context of love which one God, one person would not. In our God, we can not only state that God is loving – we can see it demonstrated in the relationship among the persons, a relationship into which we are invited, into which we are baptized. It is not by accident that Jesus told his disciples in our gospel passage today – baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are not baptized in the name of one person or another, but of God in all of his richness, in all of his relationships. In effect, Jesus told his apostles to go and make disciples of all, welcoming them into the community of love that is one God in Three Persons – a Trinity, essential and inseparable. Our task is to remember that our happiness, our very existence depends on God – God is essential in our lives. And, just as the members of the Trinity are never separated from one another, we must do our best not to separate ourselves from God by observing all that Jesus commanded. In short, if we remember that God is essential, we will make ourselves inseparable from him.