

*The Nazareth Page*  
*A gospel reflection for the home*  
*June 11, 2017 - The Most Holy Trinity*  
*John 3:16-18*

Today's gospel includes one of the most well-known passages in the Bible. Reference to it has been printed on large signs that appear in the end zone seats at major football games. A while back, those who operate TV cameras were told to not show those signs. Some kind of conflict, it seems. A recent president of the United States was asked what was his favorite gospel line. He immediately responded, "John 16:3." Close enough. We know what he meant.

This Sunday is often not the favorite of priests and deacons who are assigned to offer a homily on the Trinity. What can they say that hasn't already been said? How can one talk about the greatest mystery of our faith? Something more than, "It's a mystery, three persons but one God. It's a great challenge. No one understands it. Accept it in faith. We'll now together recite the Creed."

Maybe we try to say too much. With that in mind, I will focus only on the first three words of today's gospel: *GOD SO LOVED*. Now for a little theology. Much has been written in recent years about the nature of God. Perhaps this is in repose to those who create false or strange descriptions of God or to those who deny the very existence of God.

Here's a summary of what seems worthwhile in recent theological writings. Much of it is simply a reflection on God's identity as the God of love or the God who loves. What this means is that God (as revealed through Jesus Christ) is Pure Love. In that sense God is not like us. We exist and then we chose to love or not. God's very being is love. It's God's nature to love. Even before Creation, God was loving - that is at the heart of the belief in God as Trinity.

One of the first theologians of the church was St. Augustine. You might recall that in his autobiography, entitled *The Confessions* (one of the first books of this kind ever written), he prayed that God give him the grace of chastity, but he added, not yet. (It's okay to smile at this.) He also wrote brilliantly about God.

When discussing the Trinity (after admitting to its mysteriousness), he said we might think of God this way: God the Father is the one who loves, God the Son is the beloved one and God the Holy Spirit is the love that moves between the Father and the Son. Some have likened the love life in God as like a spiraling dance, always moving, always spirited, always joyful, always loving. When we love one another, we are most like God. Enough said.

David Thomas, PhD

*The Nazareth Page*  
*A gospel reflection for the home*  
*June 18, 2017 – The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ*  
*John 6:51-58*

I grew up eating Wonder Bread. My aunt worked for that bakery so it was partly out of family obligation that my mother only brought home Wonder Bread for our family meals. It was spongy soft, largely tasteless and never seemed to go stale. This might be explained by the fact that there were six of us so it wasn't around that long to test its longevity. It was from Wonder Bread that I learned about the connection between bread and life. Breakfast toast and luncheon sandwiches sustained my body's survival.

In today's gospel Jesus also talked about bread, but a bread that was much more wondrous than Wonder Bread. It was also better than the bread called manna that the Jews were given by God in the desert as they made their way to the Promised Land. That bread only lasted one day but don't worry, there was a fresh shipment sent each morning from heaven. Thus, it was called "bread from heaven."

But Jesus was telling his followers about a new kind of bread, a bread that was his body. We can only wonder what his listeners thought when first hearing of bread that was the flesh of Jesus Christ. At the Last Supper, he changed the bread and wine of that meal into his body and blood. And in memory of that supper and his command to continue this sacred act (Do this in memory of me.), Christians have been doing this for almost 2,000 years.

The church teaches that the bread and wine we consume has been miraculously transformed into Jesus himself. When we receive Holy Communion, we not only receive Christ but also Christ receives us. We are drawn into God through Jesus. This is a miraculous event almost beyond words. It is a truth of our faith that deserves our prayerful attention.

One of the major obstacles of the Christian life is that even acts that are incredibly significant and meaningful can lose their influence through routine. Receiving Christ in the Eucharist can become not much more than leaving our pew, walking to the communion minister, consuming holy bread and wine and then returning to our seat. Hopefully, it is much more than that.

Receiving Holy Communion is receiving Christ, the most important person who ever lived. The person who is both human and divine. The person who lived and died for us and who wants to form a deep relationship with us. Christ longs to be close to us. Do we want to be close to him? We can and we are reminded this Sunday that we truly can.

David Thomas, PhD

*The Nazareth Page*  
*A gospel reflection for the home*  
*June 25, 2017 – 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*Matthew 10:26-33*

Most of the gospels we hear each Sunday give us little cause for questioning. They are straight-forward. We listen to (or read) their words and we nod our heads in agreement. "Yes, I can understand this or that point. It makes sense. I agree."

But sometimes, like in today's gospel, we might think that the gospel is a bit confusing. Jesus is telling us that loving our parents or our children seems not that important. Maybe even harmful. Pope Francis has written that family is *very important*. Maybe he's not familiar with this gospel.

Of course, he knows it well, but he would also ask that we carefully reflect on what it is saying so that we don't misunderstand it. Jesus is talking about priorities. It's like he is making a list of what should be first in importance, and then second, and so forth.

Although it's not in this Sunday's readings, we might recall what Jesus taught about the two great commandments. Number one commandment was that we should love God above all else. Number two was that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Jesus found both these commandments in his Jewish Scriptures, in what we call the Old Testament.

Then he went on to explain that these two commandments are closely connected. When he gave his last set of instructions at the Last Supper, he said that the two commandments are really one large commandment. He joined them together when he said, "Love one another as I have loved you."

In practical everyday life, we love God in part by loving each other. Parents love their children and children love their parents. And family love can spread out into the whole world. But it all starts with God lovingly creating each of us. God is the first to love us. Without God loving us, we simply would not even be. Without God's love for you, you wouldn't be reading these words because there would be no "you."

So, love God with all your heart and then love others (including yourself). St. Ignatius Loyola composed a set of meditations for people seriously interested in developing their spiritual lives. The first meditation focuses on God's love as the origin of all creation, ourselves included. That was to be the foundational belief for all who seek to better know God and God's ways with us. Family plays a decisive role in God's plan. But there's something deeper than family and more important than us. That's God's love, which created us.

David Thomas, PhD