

## The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity – Cycle A May 18, 2008

Readings: Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; John 3:16-18

### Does God Have a Beard?

A few months after we were married, way back in 1973, I let my beard grow. Jenni liked it and she asked that I keep it. I tried not to take it personally; that she thought I looked better when my face was hidden under a beard. Obviously, my kids had never seen me without a beard, and when they got in their teen years, they started to bug me to shave it off to see what I really looked like. So I decided to turn their request into a challenge. As my oldest daughter headed off to college 13 years ago, I told her I would shave off my beard if she got a four point, all-A, report card. After two years of coming very close but not succeeding (she got a couple of A minuses), my second daughter joined her at college. To improve the chances of keeping my beard, I changed the rules a little and said that they would both have to get a four point in the same semester; it wouldn't be fair for one of them to miss the mark and still reap the benefit of seeing dad shorn. I made it through the remaining years of the girls' college time, and then through five years of my son's college time without losing my beard. My youngest daughter, Andi, started at Oakland University three years ago. And a couple of weeks ago she called me to inform that she had attained a perfect, all-A, report card for the winter semester. The ironic thing about it is that I helped her do it; I'm not sure she would have gotten that A in Physics without my tutoring.

So last week, while I was down in Florida celebrating my retirement, the beard came off. We thought it best to take it off before I spent too much time in the sun. I didn't want to get a tan line. I'll probably keep it off until after our Memorial Day barbeque when the kids and grandkids will be coming into town. But, Jenni is afraid that my granddaughter won't recognize me. I am still the same loving grandpa she knew before; I am the same one Grandpa Hulway, but I will have a little different appearance.

On this Trinity Sunday, it is good for us to stop and remember that there is only one God. He may reveal Himself to us through different images, we may see Him differently in our mind's eye, but He is the one and the same loving God.

In our first reading this morning we see Moses up on Mt. Sinai. This is the second time that Moses went up with stone tablets to receive the Ten Commandments. You'll remember the first ones were shattered when Moses came down and saw the people worshipping the golden calf. And now God came down in a cloud and stood there with him. The previous chapter of the Book of Exodus explains how this was to happen. God said to Moses, *"I will make all my beauty pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce my name, 'LORD'; I who show favors to whom I will, I who grant mercy to whom I will. But my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives. Here,"* continued the LORD, *"is a place near me where you shall station yourself on the rock.*

***When my glory passes I will set you in the hollow of the rock and will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, so that you may see my back; but my face is not to be seen.***

Moses never got the chance to see God's face; never got a chance to see if He has a beard. But Moses did hear God reveal a little more about Himself. He heard that the Lord is ***"a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity."*** And in our gospel we hear Jesus tell Nicodemus that God is a loving God; that ***"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life."*** God is slow to anger, but He will become angry as he did with those worshipping the golden calf. God is loving. Out of love God sent His only Son, but we hear that those who do not believe in His Son have already been condemned. God is merciful, but God is also just. He will forgive our sins, but first we must repent and mend our ways.

The God of the Old Testament that Moses encountered on Mt. Sinai is the same God of the New Testament. The Israelites knew Him by the name Yahweh, meaning "I AM". God is one; God called Himself "I AM", not "WE ARE". Through Jesus we now have a better understanding of God. And Jesus also revealed Himself as God. He said: ***"Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM."*** (Jn. 8:58) It is for this reason that the Jews wanted to kill Him. And Jesus also taught us about His Father and His Spirit. And so we now know that God has three dimension, and we call God the Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through Jesus' humanity we know a little more about God's divinity. But it is still very much a mystery. The Catechism says: ***"The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself."*** (CCC #234)

We all have different images of God. It might be a King with flowing robes and a long white beard sitting on a throne. It might be a dove or a tongue of fire. It might be a lamb or a shepherd. These are all useful images of God that can help us relate and pray to God better, but they are limited by the capacity of our human mind. We cannot begin to imagine or fathom what God is like or what He looks like, but we can learn about His attributes from scripture.

God is goodness and truth. He is gracious, just, and merciful. He is all-knowing and all-powerful. But, most of all God is all-loving. And as Christians we see that love expressed in the Trinity, which is an expression of the love of a family. Pope John Paul II said: ***"God in His deepest mystery is not a solitude but a family, since He has in Himself Fatherhood, Sonship, and the essence of the family, which is love."***

God invites us to be members of His loving family and we accept that invitation through our baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The Father demonstrated His love for us by sending us His only Son and Jesus demonstrated His love for us by sacrificing His life. To be true members of God's family, we must also demonstrate unselfish love to God and to one another. All the commandments are based on this demand for love. Jesus said: ***"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first"***

*commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” (Mt. 22:37-40)*

The Trinity is family love. Our goal should be to demonstrate that same love of the Trinity within our own families.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**