

Trinity Sunday 2020: In Defense of Mystery

The Rev. Paul D. Allick, The Church of the Advent, June 7, 2020

I get apprehensive with people of faith who have it all figured out. I do not believe a Christian can or should have an answer for every aspect of their faith.

We Christians are not involved in a forgone conclusion. We live in a process of revelation. We are growing and learning. That is the meaning of discipleship: we are students in the school of the Lord.

Our religion is full of mysteries. The Holy Eucharist is a central mystery for us. And today we remember the mystery of the Holy Trinity. One God in three persons in such complete unity that there are no distinctions among them.

Once while I was teaching a confirmation class, I had just finished an explanation about what each piece of the mass meant. One young man, whom I knew to be very enamored of science, said to me, "You can't prove any of this stuff you just told us."

The Holy Spirit gave me the response. I answered, "If I could prove any of this to you, we wouldn't be here. We would mark it all down as a fact, put it in an encyclopedia and go home. We wouldn't need faith."

We live in a culture that was long ago shaped by the Enlightenment. In this vein the knowledge of facts always trumps mystery. If an idea cannot be concretely codified then it has no legitimacy.

This is also why so many Christians approach their faith as if it can be proved. We also have been shaped by the Enlightenment. We like to argue, "It says in the bible." As if that made it a concrete fact. As if the Bible were a text book full of data. The Bible is not full of facts. The Bible is full of truth.

As Christians we live with a process of revelation. We begin with the mysteries revealed in Holy Scripture. We study them over and over to learn how God has revealed himself and his plan for humanity.

Then we turn to tradition, primarily the Creeds and the Early Church writers. How did our spiritual ancestors come to understand the mysteries of God in Christ?

Lastly, we apply our reason to Scripture and Tradition. How does this make sense in our time and place?

In this way of life, we are seeking wisdom not data.

The Holy Trinity is a mystery. God in three persons and yet one God is hard for us to comprehend. It remains a mystery but our creeds tell us that it is true.

To label something a mystery in a culture which worships rationalism could be seen as a cop out. It isn't. It is an omission that we do not yet understand all truth. In other words, we are not God nor do wish to become little gods through facts and figures.

To speak of the mysteries of our faith is not to say we will never know the truth. It is to say that the doctrines of our faith are true whether we fully understand them or not.

Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "Mystery for the Christian means an incomprehensible certainty not an interesting uncertainty."

At the heart of the matter is this: if we live in a culture which values factual knowledge over mystery then we live in a culture which has no regard for wisdom. It is the entering into the mysteries of Christ and accepting our own limitations in that journey which makes us grow in wisdom.

Plenty of us in this world have all kinds of knowledge but do we have wisdom?

Reference: *The Mystery of the Eucharist in Anglican Tradition*, p. 3
By H.R. McAdoo & Kenneth Stevenson
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