

18th Sunday after Pentecost

Dearly beloved,

St. Therese of Lisieux, whose feast was celebrated last week, said that she greatly disliked when priests did not preach on the Gospel, and instead wandered off on their own tangents. So today I risk inciting her wrath, but the Secret prayer today is too wonderful to pass over in silence. The Secret, also called the prayer over the oblation, is a way of finishing the offertory—the priest has offered the bread and wine to the Holy Trinity that it may become the Body and Blood of Christ, and this prayer serves as a midway point between the offertory and the consecration, and with it, the Church asks for some special grace in connection with the offering. It is called the Secret because in the Gallican liturgy, it was read quietly by the priest, and it is from Gaul that the tradition of this prayer comes, as it was not part of the ancient Roman liturgy.

The Secret prayer for today, the 18th Sunday after Pentecost, says: “O God, who by the wondrous commerce of this sacrifice, dost make us participants of the one highest divinity; grant we beseech Thee that as we know Thy truth, we may follow upon it with fitting behavior.”¹ I have translated it slightly differently than the propers sheet in order to capture the deeper meaning of the Latin words, because there are many profound ones used in the prayer. *Commercium*, which means trade or commerce or communication, invokes the idea of an exchange between God and man via the Incarnation. Or *unius summæ divinitatis*, so difficult to translate well, but meant to make us ponder what we participate in, for it is not just something great or interesting, it is the only divinity that exists, higher than the angels and so unlike any creature that it cannot be rightly conceived by man and yet we are called to share in it.

The word I wish to focus on, though, is *participes*. The prayer says that the sacrifice of the Mass makes us *participes* in God’s divinity. The word could be translated various ways: participants, partakers, sharers. It is a strong Latin word, literally meaning to take possession of, or to seize a part of something. It is a good Latin word for the concept of our sharing in the life of the Trinity, for it captures the difficulty of it, even the violence necessary to make it possible.

Of course the violence does not come on our part, but on God’s. For we could never seize a part of God without Him wishing that we should do so, and He makes this possible through the Incarnation, in which He humbles Himself to become man that we might become God. God condescends so that we may ascend to Him by means of the sacrifice of the Cross. He shares in our humanity that we might share in His divinity. The action is wholly on His part; we need only open ourselves to such an exchange. We seize a part of God, not insofar as God can be divided, but because our share in Him is incomplete compared to His own possession of Himself.

And what do we share in or partake of when we are participants in God? Perhaps the translation ‘share’ is most helpful here. When another human being shares something important with us, he or she shares something already owned by that person, which is freely given to us. The thing shared does not diminish in value by being shared, but remains intact. The more profound the thing shared, the greater the participation in that person’s life, and also the more freely it must be given, and in a way, the more fragile it is. The most profound things human beings can share with one another are our bodies and our souls. Both of these forms of participation are rare and privileged and holy—one may only share one’s body in marriage, and that to the end that the woman may share her body with the child conceived—and while one may share one’s soul with many, it only actually happens in a handful of cases in any person’s earthly life when actual participation in the other’s soul occurs.

The sharing of souls is much like what happens with our participation in God. It can be known by reason that God exists, but to know that God is three persons is not knowable except that God should reveal it to us. In an

¹ Deus, qui nos, per hujus sacrificii veneranda commercia, unius summæ divinitatis participes efficiis: præsta, quæsumus; ut, sicut tuam cognoscimus veritatem, sic eam dignis moribus assequamur.

analogy with our sharing of souls with other humans, many see our outside, but only a few are privileged to see our insides. In revealing Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God tells us something about Himself that can only be known by His telling us; we could never know it no matter how much we studied and contemplated His attributes, like goodness, truth, and beauty. Perhaps the Trinity is not the mystery of our Faith that most resonates with us or touches us most deeply, but it should be, for it is the foundation of all the other truths of our Faith, and it is the reason why Christ came to earth—he came to save us from our sins, but He also came for so much more—to make it possible for us to share in God’s knowledge of Himself. So we should value the mystery as we would if someone shared a hidden secret of their heart with us: it is a grace and not something to be taken lightly, even if we cannot fully understand what has been shared. To be chosen to be told such a thing is a privilege and an honor, and also a sign of trust and love.

By way of this knowledge of the Trinity, we can then choose to either love God as He reveals Himself or not to love Him. Again, this is an analogy with human knowledge—just because someone tells us their soul’s secrets does not mean we will love them—otherwise there would be no country music. Once someone has revealed their soul to us, we can either love them or choose to find what they reveal to us as not loveable. We may take for granted that when God reveals Himself, He is loveable, but remember that there are religions built upon denying God as Trinity, with Islam being an obvious example. There are sections in the Quran that deny that God has a Son—this is Muhammad choosing not to love God as He has revealed Himself—that God should have a Son is not loveable. And there have always been versions of Christianity that denied the divinity of either the Son or the Spirit because they judged it unworthy of love.

For us, we do not deny the doctrine, but we likely neglect the mystery. That is why it is good to consider how we share in God’s knowledge and in His love—he shows us His heart, as it were, and He expects that we love Him because of this, that we love Whom he has revealed Himself to be. And yet it is easy to grow indifferent or to forget that there are men and women in this world who have never been taught the doctrine of Trinity and thus never been given a chance to love God as He truly is, and there are also those who hearing the revelation of God, reject it. As Christ says in the Gospel of Matthew, “All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” The Son has chosen to reveal the Father to us, to each one of us who worship here today, and we should rejoice in that. Our lives would have so much less happiness, most of us would not be friends, we would have little or no hope in eternal life, if the Son had not revealed the inner life of God to us, each of us as individuals, for the way we came to believe is also according to the Providential workings of God.

So how can we show greater love toward for His revelation of Himself to us? Besides meditating on the mystery of the Trinity with the help of a great theologian such as Augustine or Aquinas or the present-day Gilles Emery, which we might find as daunting as it is rewarding, we can lovingly participate in a divine mystery we know very well—that of the Cross. Sin has rendered the human experience broken, disappointing and painful, both in body and soul. Christ bore all these things in His human nature for our sakes, and each of us is given many chances a day to share in His Cross, and to thereby do reparation for our sins. But we not only do reparation—when we accept our own crosses with love, whether they are our daily contradictions or the deeper sorrows we continually bear, such as a habit of sin, or a strained marriage, or fallen-away family members, or the illness or loss of a loved one—we also show love for the Trinity and the Incarnation. We show the Father that we love His Son, who has died for us, and we show the Father and Son we love the Spirit by responding generously to His inspirations to accept our trials not only as trials, but as salvific trials, as trials that have meaning both now and for eternity.

So today, as we prepare to share in the mystery of the Cross by partaking of the Body and Blood of the Son of God, may our prayer be that we will more lovingly contemplate the beauty of God’s revelation of Himself to us. May Christ, who dwells in us through the Sacrament, teach us inwardly to love the Cross and so to love the Trinity, and to never waste an opportunity to worship God in this way, whether it be in trial or in consolation. And by doing these things, may we come to the New Jerusalem, where we shall see the face of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and reign with Him forever.