

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY “B”
40TH ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION AS PRIEST
MAY 31, 2015

Displayed in front of the ambo is an icon of the Holy Trinity. A smaller copy is on the cover of today’s Mass program. I chose to display it for two reasons: first; it is a visual proclamation and invitation into the mystery of today’s feast of the Holy Trinity; second; it also frames the commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of my ordination as a priest on this day, May 31, 1975.

Over the years icons and their spirituality have, and continue, to play important roles in my ministry and spirituality. Today’s icon of the Holy Trinity is by the Russian iconographer, Andrei Rublev. Its subject is the biblical story of the meeting between Abraham and three unnamed visitors (often referred to as angels) in chapter 18 of the book of Genesis. The angels announce to Abraham that he and Sarah will have a child, fulfilling God’s earlier covenant promise to Abraham of land and descendants. In an act of hospitality and gratitude, Abraham serves a meal to his guests. The early Christian Church Fathers saw in this story a prototype of the mystery of God’s revelation as the Holy Trinity. Much has been written about this image. I’d like to highlight two points. First, the three guests gathered at table. In the center on the table is a dish of lamb in front of the second angel, traditionally identified as Jesus, the Lamb of God, who laid down his life for us and continues to gift us with that life in the Holy Eucharist. Second, is the open space on the side of the table facing us. It is an invitation to us to join the holy ones in communion at the table. This icon takes on flesh and blood again today in and through us. Every celebration of the Holy Eucharist is a privileged moment of encounter and response between God and us, and each of us with one another.

Our reading from Deuteronomy reminds us, just like Abraham and Sarah, God in love continues his initiative of invitation to relationship with us in human history. Accepting this invitation, like Abraham and Sarah, results, for us, as St. Paul in the second reading reminds us, in our being drawn into the communion of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; seated at table as God’s children.

On the commemorative card I had printed as a remembrance of my ordination as a priest, I selected these words from St. Paul's first chapter of the letter to the Romans: ***I need your help, for I want not only to share my faith with you but to be encouraged by yours: each of us will be a blessing to the other. (Rom. 1:12).*** This Scripture verse for me, gives expression to the dynamic of this icon and has been, and continues, to be a "mission statement" for me as a priest.

Like every priest, at the center of my life is the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the Mass. At it, especially through the homily, I have tried to "share my faith with you" as we have gathered at the Lord's Table. There have been other "tables" where I have had the privilege of sharing my faith—full-time high school classroom teaching; teaching in our archdiocesan program of lay ministry formation; twenty-three years teaching in the formation program for the permanent diaconate, retreat presentations and others. Then there are the tables of meals and conversation and laughter taken together; tables of joy shared at birth or marriage; standing or sitting at the table of sickness at a bedside; the table of quiet listening and simply holding each other in trial, tragedy and death, all times when I have tried, as best I could, to "break the bread" and "share the cup" of my faith, bringing the presence of God to whatever table we happened to find ourselves seated and encountering each other at.

Today also celebrates the presence of God each of you has brought to those tables we've shared, your gift to me, my being "encouraged by your faith." Every one of you here today, as well as those who cannot be here, and those celebrating with us fully in the presence of God, I think of my father especially: your words and the witness of your life, your faith, have been, and are still, a means of God's presence and grace molding me into the priest I am today. Your prayers, your friendship, your words have been "bread and cup", holy communion in Jesus for me.

Once again we gather at table, are seated, encounter and are encountered by God in his Sacrament and the sacrament of each other. Doing so, I offer once again these words I of forty years ago today: ***"I need your help, for I want not only to share my faith with you but to be encouraged by yours: each of us will be a blessing to the other."*** (Rom. 1:12). I love you all. Thank you for loving me.