

Feast of the Holy Trinity (A)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
June 10, 11, 2017

Some years ago when visiting a cousin in the Phoenix area, we took a day trip to St. Anthony Greek Orthodox Monastery, which is a little more than an hour south of Chandler, Az. Of course, it is in the middle of a desert. But the monastery property itself is like an oasis. Lush green lawns and bountiful orchards cover the property. But the most amazing part of it is the inside huge chandeliers from Greece, and the most magnificent icons of Greek Orthodox saints. One is in awe from the moment of entering. It felt like a place dropped from another land. It was like walking into something from another world. While located in a desert, its sheer beauty would be inspiring no matter where located.

That memory and that experience are nothing, however, when placed next to today's Feast of the Holy Trinity, and the indwelling of God in each of us. In my little article in this week's bulletin I quote St. Catherine of Siena who reminds us that we are created differently than everything else of creation. We are created in the 'image and likeness of God'. And even beyond that God even dwells in us. We call that indwelling by the name 'grace'. The word 'grace' itself means 'gift' or 'blessing'. (I guess that is why we refer to our before meal prayers as 'grace'. We acknowledge that our food is a gift, a blessing – that we are gifted to have food, as many in today's world simply do not have sufficient food. I personally think, however, that using the word 'grace' only in this way is 'grace-lite'. Limiting the word 'grace' to refer to our 'before meal prayer', as many today do, misses the entire reality of God's indwelling, that we are of God – that God dwells in us – unless of course we turn away from God

An analogy is what we imagine and joke about when thinking of someone being 'radioactive' – we joke that the person would glow. Even more 'corny' is the analogy with ET – (remember that cute little alien that we all fell in love with from the movies several years ago?) Well, the indwelling of God in each of us is meant to radiate goodness, radiate God to the world. We are sacred, holy, ETs (That may push the analogy way beyond – but if it gets you thinking more about grace, then it can serve a purpose.) As a matter of fact, this is why we clothe the newly baptized in a white garment and why in the early Church the newly baptized adults wore their white garment for all the 50 days of Easter. They wanted to acknowledge the indwelling of God in them through the waters of their Baptism.

Let me give you two terms many will remember from your religious training years ago, and what those younger need to know about as well:

sanctifying grace
actual grace

Sanctifying grace is the true indwelling of God in us. Sanctifying grace, God's indwelling, makes us holy. It is what allows us to think of ourselves as Temples of the Holy spirit. We would be a lot better off today if we recognized this - I may not use foul language as often; I may treat my neighbor with greater kindness if I thought of them as they truly are – A Temple of God -- full of grace, full of God. Remember how years ago we even used the phrase – being in the state of grace? It meant that we were aligned with God, in touch with God; that God dwelt within us. Sanctifying grace. (**Sacraments**)

Then there is actual grace. This is the grace, help we receive in individual and daily situations. This is the 'grace' we mean when we say, 'there but for the grace of God go I' and "only by the grace of God did we survive, or achieve this." We depend on the grace of God to be with us in so many daily situations.

Today's first Scripture, while from the OT , gives us great wisdom for the week. In the middle of it we hear what this God who dwells within us, this God who is sanctifying grace, is like. Listen again to how it speaks of God: "*The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity.*" To understand these words, we must realize that God considers us to be in 'covenant' with Him. God considers us partners. Thus God also makes His dwelling within us. God 'graces' our lives with His divine presence. In this light, then, the words about God merciful, gracious, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness identify the dispositions of God toward his partners.

Mercy – this is womb love, the kind of attachment one has for the child of one's body. (for obvious reasons this is easier for women to feel and understand than for men maybe also why women often 'get God' easier and deeper than men). Twins who shared a womb can understand this easier as well. As men and single birth people, we need to work harder at this, but it is necessary that we understand this. God is merciful and loves us like the child of His own womb.

Gracious – this is a synonym for compassionate God suffers with us, and understands our suffering, our struggle.

Slow to anger – God is reluctant to rain divine wrath down on those who violate his partnership with Him partners don't rain anger down on each other.

Loving kindness and faithfulness – God is steadfast in loving us. God clings to us as partners with Him in the transformation of this world into the Kingdom.

When Moses realized this, as also stated in today's First Scripture, he prostrated himself on the ground in deep adoration. And this is the response that God desires from us. God does not desire deep adoration from us for himself, but because when we do God knows that we 'get what He, God, is about, and that we recognize our partnership with Him in all of this.

Being 'full of grace' is not just a "Mary thing." We are also 'full of grace'. Our mission is to live this in gratitude. Especially when we come together at the Table of the Lord.