

## *Another name for God is love.*

Years ago a teacher tried to explain the Trinity - three persons in one God - to a class of third graders by using a shamrock as an example.

When test time came, one of her students responded to the question, "Who is God?" with the interesting reply: "God is small and green and split three ways."

But if we're looking for a better image than a shamrock for the Trinity, we need look no further than a love affair - a deep relationship. I think most of us, if asked to name our greatest gift, would probably name our friends or family - both, if we are lucky. If asked to name the happiest, the deepest, the truest or the holiest moment in our lives, we would probably tell about the time when we were with others - or had a great sense of not being alone.

We need other people to get the whole picture, or at least a larger segment of the whole picture. We need to see and be seen, to know and be known, to speak and be spoken to, to hear and be heard, to love and be loved.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity reminds us that love does not dwell alone. Even (and especially) within God, love is passionate and life-giving, interacting with and delighting in the other.

Different cultures have different ways of depicting the Trinity. In the near East, for example, three people are shown in a circle, dancing. This divine dance is an exciting image of the Godhead, standing in contrast with other Trinitarian symbols like the triangle, which may impress us as inert.

The symbolism of dance, however, encompasses a sense of joy, beauty and creative movement that seems better-suited to divine life and love. It opens up a vista unto the unimaginable - a mystery.

St. Jerome said, "The true profession of the mystery of the Trinity is to own that we do not comprehend it." Our understanding of the Trinity may always be imperfect and incomplete. We may never fully understand One God. Three Persons. Distinct, yet united. But when we gather as a community of faith to celebrate and worship, we are living in its reality!

There's a famous icon, one of those holy pictures of the Russian Orthodox Church, which probably portrays our being with the Trinity as a community. It was painted in Russia some five centuries ago by Andrew Rublev. It shows three persons sitting at a square table on which there is a wine-filled cup.

There's a fourth seat at the table, and you get the feeling that it's reserved for you, the viewer. It's as if the three persons in the picture are just waiting for

someone to join them around the cup. An invitation to relationship with God! Rublev entitled this marvelous painting simply, "The Holy Trinity." A reproduction of this icon was on the memorial card given out at the funeral of Catherine Mowry LaCugna, who did much to help Christians recapture the true meaning of the Trinity. She once wrote about it: "One has the distinct sensation when meditating on the icon that one is not only invited into this communion, but, indeed, one already is part of it."

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