

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend we celebrate Trinity Sunday. We might get confused by the theology of the Trinity (after all, how can we understand that God is three persons, but NOT three Gods... one God... but NOT three phases of the one God... three distinct persons... but one God... okay, I'm confused!). Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, we can see some reflection of Him in us, though. We each know love, long for love, love others (even if imperfectly). St. John, in his first letter, says, "**God is love**" (I John 4:8, 16). Love is gift of self, so, therefore, God is Trinity, for there must be three – the lover, the one that is loved, and that which unites them ... love.

I want to take this truth that *God is love* and go a little deeper with our exploration of God. Recently, I was reminded of the four different words for love in Greek: *storge*, *philia*, *eros*, and *agape*. Each of them speaks about a different aspect of love, a different aspect that we are familiar with, and yet are longing for. Each of these aspects of love point to part of the Heart of God as love.

*Storge* is affection – the natural affection that we might feel for a child. It raises feelings within us. Think about this – the deepest affection you may have for a child or a parent, the deepest affection you may have for someone – this affection is a hint, a shadow of God's affection for us. You realize that God doesn't just put up with us... He has a deep affection for you. He is always watching you – NOT as the authority who is making sure you don't mess up. Rather, He is like the mother who watches her child sleeping ... she can't keep her eyes off of him. God can't keep His eyes off of you!

*Philia* is friendship. This love requires loyalty, commitment, honesty, reciprocity, and the gift of time. This love takes work, since it requires going beyond ourselves to help the other. I remember being in seminary. One of my friends in a moment of brokenness approached me to share what was going on in his life and his heart. Up to that point, we had spent a lot of time hanging out, sharing common interests, but it wasn't until this moment that I realized what real friendship was. He had trusted me enough to share his brokenness, and I was there to listen and support him. From that experience, I learned how to be a friend to him and to others. God's love is the perfect friend. He has opened His Heart to us, shown us His vulnerability (hint – His love for you and me is His vulnerable spot). He suffered excruciating physical, mental, emotional and spiritual pain to show us how much He loves us. He stands with us in all of our suffering and pain. The best friend you have is a dim reflection of the supportive, friendship love God has for you.

The most misunderstood love is *eros*. *Eros* is romantic love, erotic love. Erotic love is good (remember that God's first commandment is "be fertile and multiply," Genesis 1:28). (Please note that there is a difference between erotic love and the pornographed love of this culture.) There is a desire in each of us is to be the first priority in someone's life, but this requires, of course, that we make that other person first priority in our lives. Romantic love requires sacrifice for us to make the other person the first priority. Think about this, God's love for you is also infinitely more romantic than any love you have ever experienced or imagined! I've said it before and I'll say it again, the summary of the Bible is "God wants to marry us." This is hard to grasp, hard to accept, and yet God loves you so much! He is head-over-heels in love with you. *You – you* – are God's first priority!

The final love is *agape* love. *Agape* is total, self-giving, unconditional love. This is love that requires no reward, no reciprocity, not even to be loved back. God loves you perfectly. He wants your good, not because of what you can do for Him, or how you make Him feel, or for any even remotely selfish reason. He loves you because *you are you!* No conditions. No strings. You can't earn His love. You can't make Him stop loving you. He just loves you, and wants your good. He didn't start loving you because of anything you did, and He won't stop loving you because of anything you do. Whatever experience of forgiving love, of merciful love, of sacrificial love we have had or hoped to have or fantasized about is just a hint of the very true love God has for you!

This is the Trinity. This is God. *God is love*. Every love we ever experienced on this earth is a hint of the infinitely greater love He has for you and for me. On this Holy Trinity Sunday, may we come into a deeper relationship with the God who is infinitely affectionately, friendly, romantically and self-givingly loving toward you and me!