

Feast of the Holy Trinity
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA
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“Donald Trump is a puppet of the Russian government. He is a monster who must be impeached.”

“James Comey is a liar, who is playing fast and loose with the facts in order to restore what’s left of his reputation.”

“The man who killed people on a train in Portland is a monster who needs to die for his crimes.”

“The Muslims who killed people on London Bridge are animals.”

“You parents who let your kids cry in church are thoughtless and rude.”

“You Catholics who are addicted to alcohol, or drugs, or pornography, are worthless hypocrites.”

“You Christians who cheat on your spouse, who are dishonest at work, who are selfish in life, are an insult to God.”

“You sinners. YOU ... you’re weak. You should be better. You should be stronger. You should have more faith.”

“You are a failure. You’re worthless.”

(how are we all doing so far?)

Listen to the angry language that surrounds us. It is the language of division, and hate, and fear. It is the language of *condemnation*.

We swim in a cesspool of condemnation. Listen to how harshly we speak to one another. Listen to the way that we dismiss the humanity of others.

When the unhinged personalities of the cable networks constantly scream that *someone* must be condemned, it becomes easier for *us* to mock one another, judge one another, condemn one another.

And if we surround ourselves with such harsh language, eventually we start to condemn even ourselves. *They're* no good... and *I'm* no good. He's a failure... I'm a failure. They're hopeless, so are we. They're condemned... and I'm condemned.

When we constantly hear the language of condemnation, it radically ruins our understanding of other people, and of ourselves. And, sadly, it ruins our understanding of God.

When people live in an angry world, they begin to believe in an angry God. When people live in a culture where everyone is condemning everyone else, they begin to believe that God is sitting on his throne, pointing the finger of condemnation at all of his sinful children. When people hear that they have no worth, they imagine a God who could say to us, "you're worthless to me."

Our faith tells us that we are created in the image and likeness of God. But what often happens is that we believe in a God who is created in the *image and likeness of us!* And when we are living in an angry, divided, condemning world, the God we create in our minds ends up being an angry, divisive, condemning God.

Which is why we need this feast of the Most Holy Trinity. Because on this feast day, the Scriptures remind us who God really is... and who we are supposed to be, since we are created in *God's* image.

What is the true identity of God? What do we discover when we adore the mystery of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

Well, let's work 'backward,' in a sense. The Holy Spirit is God's vitality, God's breath, breathing within us. As we celebrated last week on the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes to us so that we can share in the life and ministry of Jesus. We are *strengthened* and we are *sent*.

Sent to do what? To do what Jesus did! He showed us the Father. He revealed the very heart of God.

And who is that God? Well, the evangelist John says it best: "God is love." In today's first reading, this God, who is love, is in the middle of forgiving the people of Israel. They were in the desert, leaving behind the slavery of Egypt, heading to the promised land.

As humans so often do, they got tired, forgetful and bored. So instead of staying focused on the Living God, they decided to make a god of their own... the golden calf.

They give their hearts to an idol. But God does not give up on them. God does not destroy all of them. God does not... what's the word? ... *condemn* them. Instead, God renews his pledge, and

revives their hope, and starts over with them... again.

“God is love” ... a love that can forgive, and lead, and start over.

That’s who God is, and that is what Jesus shows us through his life and ministry. We heard it in John’s Gospel today. It’s one of the most famous lines in the New Testament:

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”

A Father who is love. A Son who reveals that love perfectly. A Spirit who refreshes us with the breath of that love, and sends us forth to carry out the mission of Jesus. A mission of love, not hate. A mission of consolation, not condemnation.

But wait a minute.

If you were listening carefully to the proclamation of the Gospel, you may have heard the last sentence, which seemingly negates my entire homily! Listen to the last sentence again:

“Whoever believes in Jesus will not be condemned,
but whoever does not believe has already been condemned,
because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Fr. Mike, didn’t you say that Jesus did *not* come to condemn us? And yet, this verse states very clearly that some people ARE already condemned, because of their lack of faith.

So is this verse telling us that God IS in the condemnation business after all? And if God is, shouldn’t WE be in the condemnation business too?

You COULD think that, until you read the *next* verses of John’s Gospel... verses we did not hear this morning.

Right after John says that some people are already condemned, we are told that the problem is this: Jesus, the light, “came into the world... but some people preferred to stay in the darkness. Because they did not want the truth of their lives to be seen.”

Jesus came. The light came. But people *chose* to remain in the dark.

Whenever John's Gospel speaks about 'condemnation,' it is NOT referring to something God does. In John's Gospel, the word 'condemnation' refers to the choices that WE make.

It's not about an angry god sending us to hell for all eternity. No.

In John's Gospel, the word 'condemnation' refers to the basic choice we all have to make: am I going to live in the dark, or walk in the light? Am I going to latch on the lies, or live in the truth? Am I going to wallow in hate, or rejoice in forgiving? Will I condemn, or will I love?

"The light came into the world."

If *I choose* to stay in the dark, then, by my own choice, I will *live* in the dark, and *walk* in the dark, and *stub my toe* in the dark, and get lost in the dark. And in the dark, the only god I will find is the god I've created in my own image and likeness – a god who is just an angry, lost and condemning as I have chosen to be.

But the Holy Trinity is a different kind of God, the living God, the loving God, who tells us what's true and heals what's broken. The Father who is love. The Son who revealed that love. The Spirit who sends us to share that love.

It's *easy* to condemn. It's often *hard* to love. But as Saint Paul said to the Corinthians: "Mend your ways. Encourage each other. And the God of love and peace will be with you."

"The God of love and peace." That's the God I want to follow. "Love and peace." That's the person I want to become. "Love and peace." That's the essence of our God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen!