

Fr. Mike Homily—May 27, 2018
Feast of the Holy Trinity

When I travel up to St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, as I do every so often for one reason or another, one of the truly sacred spaces there for me to walk is the cemetery, which is situated on a hill just west of the beautiful lake. Among other people, it is the place of rest for all of the monks who lived and worked there for the past 160 years. And what always strikes me about those monastic grave stones is that they are almost all exactly the same. With the exception of the deceased abbots, every monk's burial marker is a large but simple slab of gray granite, inscribed with his first name on one side, his surname on the other, and a cross.

That's it. I've known just enough of those monks over the years to recognize that some of them were internationally renowned scholars and teachers. Some were presidents of the university. Some were brilliant artists and musicians, and outstanding pastors.

And some were carpenters and farmers and laborers. And some were sources of scandal. Some were priests and some were what they used to call "lay brothers." It doesn't matter when it comes to a headstone. Everybody gets the same one, because everybody belonged to the community, and that's what is important in the end. In fact, as I mentioned, almost all of them are identical. But there's one—just one—which recognizes this monk's achievement as the rector of St. John's Seminary decades ago. I've always wondered why that's the single stone that attempts to tout this person's importance and work. I mean no disrespect, but there are many other monks in that sacred place who attained at least that kind of status and influence, but their stones don't speak of them.

That one stone, for me, only serves to emphasize the significance of all the dozens and dozens of other ones. Ultimately at the end of life, one's dignity does not come as the result of what one has accomplished, whether impressive or not-so-much, whether noble or not-so-much, whether noticed or not-so-much.

One's dignity comes from exactly one thing: to whom does one belong; by whom is one claimed and loved and welcomed into community.

Without that kind of primordial identity, all our other earthly efforts and achievements are fairly unimportant—perhaps close to worthless. And our failures are simply tragic. It's the sameness of all those grave stones in the monks' cemetery that makes it so visually obvious: This person was important because he belonged to us. And still does.

And he belonged to Christ—and still does.

And that is at the heart of this solemnity feast day of the Most Holy Trinity. We remember and celebrate again the mystery that is at the very center of our faith: Whatever else may befall us in this life, whatever our successes or disappointments, whatever our happiness or grief, we belong to God, whose very name is communion—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have been claimed by these three at our baptism, these three who are one, and we will never be let go—unless that is our wish and our choice. We belong to God, not because of any good enough thing we have done or any rank we have achieved, but because it's God's very nature, God's very identity, to be a communion of love and welcome.

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That's why Jesus can promise two things in his farewell speech in today's Gospel of Matthew, after his resurrection. First he promises that all people are to be welcomed as disciples, from every nation...like say, North Korea, Iran, Mexico, Russia—wherever his invitation to community is accepted. This is radical stuff, because God's love is just that large. Certainly larger than ours tends to be.

And the second promise is that God will remain with us always, until the end of the world. Not because we deserve that—we don't ever—but because God's very nature will not allow Him to cast out people whom he has claimed as his own.

Is there anything that it is impossible for God to do? Yes, there's exactly one thing. God cannot be unfaithful to himself. God cannot be someone other than who/what God is. And our celebration of the Most Holy Trinity shows us yet again that God's own name is loving communion, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. God cannot be something other than welcoming, self-emptying love, no matter what we do.

Today, in addition to keeping this feast, we celebrate together the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and it is absolutely appropriate to do so as a community, as we do twice each year. Often it is those who are physically, spiritually, or emotionally diminished who can be at greatest risk of feeling forgotten about, left behind, unable to do enough for themselves or others. This is exactly the moment when we all need to recall just who God is and how God cares for us. God will not allow us to be separated from love and community, no matter what, unless that is our choice. Like the monks in the cemetery, we all belong equally here, whatever our history, whatever our life story, whatever our present condition, whatever our doubts or fears. We don't save ourselves. God does that, and God won't ever stop doing that. So let us invoke God's spirit upon those who may be feeling particularly vulnerable or weak or afraid just not. Let us show them the embrace of God's communion of love, as we pray.