

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In life, there are many "rites of passage", such as baptism, confirmation, marriage, and so on. At this time of year, we recognize our graduates...from college last month, and from high school just around the corner. Graduation is significant since it means change, both for the graduates and their families. Most of the graduates will be leaving home soon, or at least beginning to spread their wings. Some will be ready, while others are afraid of what the future may bring...but, no matter what, change is in the air.

That is the case today in the gospel of John. Jesus was reminding his disciples that he would no longer be with them as he was in the past. They were accustomed to his daily teachings, his preaching and his acts of ministry. They were used to the daily intimate relationship. But, that would all change. They would be on their own.

So, to comfort them he promises that they will not be without spiritual guidance in the future. The Holy Spirit will be there to guide them. The "Spirit of Truth" will be their link to Jesus. They need not be afraid nor will they experience a void in their lives since the Spirit of Truth will be with them.

What Jesus promises is quite different from the routine graduation speeches we hear. You know the sayings. "Work hard. Be good citizens. Further your education. Be persons of character. Push yourselves beyond your limits. Pursue your dreams...." Jesus knows we will be tested in the future in ways we cannot foresee. In other words, the future is full of surprises, both joy and disappointment. The Spirit of truth is not one who will predict the future to us or explain it to us, but rather enables us to look to the future in faith.

Looking back, I remember when leaving home was...or was not...a problem for me. As a child, I went to Boy Scout camp for a week for the first time when I was about twelve years old, and I can remember the agony of that first night in the bunk, away from home. I cried all night, being so homesick and afraid of being alone. Not ready. Yet, when it came time to go to college, I could not wait for the unknown..the big city of downtown Buffalo and all those exciting challenges of new faces and new experiences. Ready this time...or so as I remember it. Once there, I encountered the Spirit of truth in the form of a resident assistant, an older and more experienced student. He told me what life was like on campus and what I could expect, and what he gave me most was comfort and assurance.

When we think of the "truth" we generally think of saying the right words, or not telling a lie. But the word "truth" in Hebrew means to sustain, to support. It means being firm, solid and reliable. Remember that in that time, John's message was competing with mythology, philosophy and mysticism....so, the truth, according to John meant not telling the truth, but living it.

Complying with the will of God. The Spirit helps us to do just that.

We all carry the genes of our parents, and are also influenced by the people we grow up with, but we are still unique. We are "truthful" in the Hebrew understanding when we live our lives with the gifts we have been given. We are truly free when we are faithful to our own aspirations and life ambitions. I had a good career in law. It has provided me with a good life, and I liked the adventure, the challenge, and

the variety of people that I came in contact with in. But, had I continued solely on that track I would have been unfaithful to the truth as God called me to a different path....and learned that the most fulfilling thing in life is to be who God made us to be, not what others want us to be. John is saying that when we are authentic to God and to ourselves, the Spirit will be with us on our life's journey.

Earlier, I mentioned graduations as a rite of passage. I am reminded on this Trinity Sunday of another...encountered during my transitional time into this calling. It did not seem to matter whether we were students, or aspirants in seminary in the formal, traditional sense...or if we were "part timers" and the seminary came to us, so to speak: each one of us was faced with the theological examination of the concept of the Holy Trinity. In other words, one did not get the full flavor or experience of seminary without writing a theological essay for examination and preaching about it.

I remember that struggle clearly. And, I would not be surprised if, in numerous pulpits this morning, preachers on Trinity Sunday are attempting to explain what the Trinity is through analogous illustrations like the three-leaf clover, and so on.

Instead, our journey leads us to better ponder not the "what" of the Trinity, but rather the "who". The important piece is to realize that Jesus is announcing a change. A passing of the baton, if you will...and that the God who is self-revealed to us across time and space, comes to be with us in yet a different way....and in the community of faith.

Wherever we go in life, no matter what our activities, even if they only take us a short distance, we need to stay connected to the life of peace that God gives to us in faith. Being connected with that spirit of truth....let us see an example of how that is done:

In a few minutes, we will proceed to open the Book of Common Prayer to page 360, helping us to understand the progression of the theology behind our worship every Sunday morning. First, it is absolutely critical that, together...myself included, of course....that we confess our sins against God and our neighbor. Everyone here knows that prayer very well, yes...but the order of worship calls us to address our sins first by verbally acknowledging them before asking God the Father's mercy and forgiveness of us through his son, Jesus.

Then, immediately, the assertion of God's absolution upon us is proclaimed, citing the very Trinity: (1) Almighty God the Father has mercy on us, forgiving our sins through (2) our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthening us in all goodness, and (3) that we be kept in eternal life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Together, we all do that before we proceed to share the peace of God with others...forgiven, all of us...and then come together before the Table of God, the Tabernacle, to share in the Body and Blood of our Lord as he commanded us...we are reinforced / held up / supported yet again, by the Holy Spirit who keeps us in eternal life....our life, here and right now, while we are alive and breathing, with hearts beating, living with the Peace of God. Knowing life of heaven here on earth. Through the spirit of truth, we remain in the community of faith, and receive support and are able to withstand all that life delivers.

Look again at the short verses from the Gospel for today. What do you see? What does that really

say to us?

Is it only by chance that Jesus mentions God the Father AND the Holy Spirit, collectively? God the Father as Creator. Jesus as the Christ, the Redeemer. And the Holy Spirit, come to us as the Sustainer.

It is a partnership of singular love. A conspiracy from and for eternity. It is relationship.

Maybe, on further reflection, the standard themes of graduation speeches are all wrong. That they are TOO focused on the emphasis toward individualism...of urging, pushing, encouraging each person to reach every upward, ever higher, ever deeper into his or her own desires, goals, dreams. That is, predictably, the message of the world...that you must look within yourself to overcome all struggles, all challenges, all obstacles, because no one else will do it for you.

That is not a message of hope. On the contrary, it is a message of hopelessness. Nose to the grindstone, because when you put your faith in yourself and your own potential, it is a message of ultimate despair and failure.

That is NOT, however, who we...as a people of this faith..are called to be...and particularly on this Trinity Sunday. In recognizing the power of the triune God, in the fullness of their eternal dance in the delight of the love that God has for all creation, especially including you and me and the random person on the street or in the gutter, we need to find, recognize and then live into the relationships with our fellow humans. Relationships of commitment, of passion, of love.

Not just because we are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves, although that is more than reason enough. But also because the residual effect of doing so is to enable, enrich and embolden others around us to find their satisfaction, in the ministries of their lives...which flows back to each of us, enriching you and me with unexpected and unexplainable blessings in our own lives.

A mutual sum gain. A win-win. Further evidence that God with us, wherever we go. In the Name of the Father who continues the work of creation in our midst, and the Son who brings us into fullness and completeness with God and with each other, and the sustaining and guiding Holy Spirit who gives pulse to our lives.

Amen.