

May 29, 2012

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.....Amen

"If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

We all encounter much in our Christian faith which we accept as truebut we accept it as true by faith and not by understanding !

Our finite earthbound human minds by their very nature cannot fully understand the infinite God – the Holy Trinity, Three in One and One in Three.

We make frequent attempts at translating the infinite into words that we can understand, but I stress that we are limited in understanding because our reality is based on our limited experience living on this tiny blue planet revolving as a speck of dust in God's massive universe

Nicodemus, was a righteous and devout follower of God. As a member of the Pharisees, he ate all the “right things,” he washed the “right way” , that is to say he was ceremonially clean in Jewish culture of the time and worshipped in the prescribed biblical ways. He knew what he had been taught but, when confronted by the teachings of Jesus, he had many unanswered questions.

So, late at night, so as not to be seen, Nicodemus' curiosity drove him to seek out Jesus..... to ask more about him and our Lord's beliefs.

Jesus revealed the mystery of the Trinity to Nicodemus.....the reality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our Lord said, “For God, the Father, the First Person of the Trinity so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son.....the Second Person of the Trinity, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life...” and all this comes to you by faith because “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit.....the Third Person of the Trinity....., he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

We all have questions about our Christian faith? Is our faith a part of our family discussion on the way home from church; at the Sunday lunch table; during the week as a part of your family devotions? I hope so! But I know in the case of my own family, now spread across thousands of miles, faith is rarely discussed.

Those of us with faith just accept it and know that it is real. We trust our Lord Jesus Christ, that what he told us will happen, that we will be reunited after death in life eternal.

In preparing this homily, I searched my mind for a story that illustrates trust and I kept coming back to my Uncle Vernon, my dad's younger brother. Some of you may have read this story in my book, "The Mushroom Farm", if so bear with me, because I know it is worth repeating.

Uncle Vernon who died some six years ago, was not just my Uncle...he was my friend for more than sixty five years...Uncle Vernon was there for me whenever I needed him. Similarly I tried to emulate that behavior and be there for him....

I am certain we all contemplate the mysteries of our faith... How can Jesus be BOTH God and Man at the same time? How can the bread and wine of Communion also be the Body and Blood of Jesus? How can the "plain water" of Holy Baptism bring us faith and forgiveness, and make us the children of God? And on Thursdays at The Sandwich Board and here on Sunday mornings when we celebrate the mystery of the Trinity in Holy Eucharist, how can Three be One and One be Three.

Uncle Vernon was a thirty year career officer in the British Royal Navy. He retired as Commander Dolan, Executive officer on the Aircraft Carrier HMS Indefatigable.

I remember Uncle Vernon as a tall, almost intimidating individual. He was always very proper, and if one arranged to meet him somewhere at a particular time, then no matter if you travelled one block or four thousand miles.....you were expected to be there on time.

As a child I would see Uncle Vernon when he was on shore leave..and he might be gone more than six months at a time....in the China Sea one moment, San Diego and Hawaii the next.

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, the Church has sought to clarify and codify the teachings of the Bible in "shorter" summary statements of faith which we call "Creeds." The Three Ecumenical Creeds of the Christian Church are the Apostle's Creed, that we read at morning prayer on Wednesdays, For the history buffs this was written circa 100 AD, the Nicene Creed that we will read immediately after this sermon, written in 325 AD and the less familiar Athanasian Creed written in 500 AD.

On one of the rare visits that Uncle Vernon made to our home, he and I were talking about my love of the Boy Scouts and I asked him would he be available to

be the Judge in our annual knot tying competition which was coming up in about six months. He consulted his schedule and agreed to do it.

As the months went by I would ask my Mom and Dad about Uncle Vernon's whereabouts....when asked whether they thought Uncle Vernon would remember the knot-tying.... their reply was ..."good gracious John... Uncle Vernon is engaged in the Korean war in the Far East...are you being serious.?" How on earth could he be here. I could not believe what they were saying, but I trusted Uncle Vernon.

Also be reminded that there was no air transport readily available in 1955.

The Athanasian Creed known as the QUICUNQUE VULT., appeared in Morning Prayer in the 1928 Prayer Book, but is now sadly nowhere to be found in our current version. The Athanasian Creed, in my humble opinion particularly helps us to contemplate the mystery of the Trinity. We accept this Biblical truth "By Faith not by Understanding.

On the night of the knot tying competition, I had not heard anything from Uncle Vernon. But in the hope of him coming, I, a thirteen year old boy dressed ready in his boy scout's uniform, stood looking out of the window looking toward the railway station.

I must have been there for about two hours with my Mom trying to distract me to other things and making excuses for Uncle Vernon.

And then..... right on time I saw this tall figure striding up the road, in full Royal Navy Dress Uniform...in my mind's eye, I can still see the gold on his sleeves and cap.

He knocked on the door, I answered it and he said Mr. John Dolan? I said yes.....he said.....Commander Vernon Dolan reporting for duty. My trust was validated. I love you Uncle Vernon, and I can't wait to see you again.

In absolute trust, we, the faithful stand awestruck at God's majesty, mystery and magnificence! What a wonder it is that the all-knowing, ever-present, all-powerful Creator of the universe would demonstrate His love for us, come into our world in our flesh to make us His own, bring us to faith and give us the gift of eternal life!

Our worship today is to stand in awe....not to fully understand in earthly terms... but to Trust and simply worship Him.....our Creator, Redeemer and SanctifierGod the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

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Amen.