



The Holy Trinity in Iconography

In *The Lord of the Rings*, by J. R.R. Tolkien, you may remember the figure of Aragorn. He is called by different names in the book and film. When Aragorn walked among them, the hobbits were used to calling him by the less brilliant and more common name of “Strider,” for his long legs seemed to take effortless strides as he travelled. Aragorn or Strider accompanies Frodo, and Sam, and Gimli, and Legolas and the others in the Fellowship of the Ring as they seek to destroy the evil Lord of Darkness, Sauron. And this tall, lean, bearded wanderer, Strider, is the Fellowship’s Leader through their adventures in Middle Earth. He seems to be such a mix of persons, does Strider. He smiles easily, and laughs often. Yet he is also somewhat withdrawn in his quiet wisdom. He appears utterly generous, willing to risk even his very life for the sake of his mission in the fight against darkness. He is, in fact, a totally mysterious figure, someone who defies classification, one who walks in different worlds at the same time.

But, finally, in the victorious scene at the end of the movie, Strider is revealed as his true person. For he is in fact, Aragorn, the direct descendent of Isildur, the High King. And he has come home to the Royal City of Minas Tirith, to finally take his rightful seat upon the exalted throne.

That’s what today is all about. This is Trinity Sunday. Jesus, who walked among us for a time, a man leading his dear friends on their adventure through our world, this Jesus who lived, and laughed, and wept, and suffered, and finally died, this Jesus has now shuffled off the mortal coil of his human form, and He is finally revealed in all His glory as The High King’s own Son. And he has taken His rightful place on the throne of heaven.

In the Old Testament, approaching God was something humans could only do with fear and dread. You may remember that Moses had to hide himself in a cleft in the rock in order not to be struck dead even by the sight of God’s back. (See Ex. 33:21-23) And do you recall Isaiah’s reaction to viewing the Lord God for the first time in all his splendor? He says, “Woe is me, for I am lost.” (Is.6:5a) The Hebrew verb *hmd* is actually much more finite. A better translation might be, “I am destroyed,” “I am cut-off,” “I am doomed.”

This moment of absolute terror, when God is seen for the first time in his startling, blinding splendor, this instant of abject awe before the holiest of holies has been given a name by theologians. It is often referred to as “the Numenous.” The Numenous is actually the quintessential component of any religious belief. The Numenous is that unexplainable, irrational fear that we experience when we find ourselves standing before the one who made us, with the certain knowledge that he can also unmake us in the blink of an eye along with the very ground on which we stand. He is power and might itself, and we are so paltry in comparison. How is it possible to feel anything else at that exact moment except a paralysis of terror? Before such a being how can we experience any emotions except fear and unworthiness?

In a book written over 1500 years ago, St. Augustine describes this feeling of awe so well. At the beginning of his *Confessions*, Augustine writes, “Who then are you, my God?...[You are] most high, utterly good, utterly powerful, most omnipotent, most merciful and most just, deeply hidden yet most intimately present, perfection of both beauty and strength, stable and incomprehensible, immutable, and yet changing all things, never new, never old, making everything new and leading the proud to be old without their knowledge. (See *Confessions* 1:4) Augustine has, indeed, experienced the awe of the Numenous, the beginning of faith when we come to grips with the Being who makes all. And it is a terrible awe to behold even vaguely such might and majesty as the Lord God.

Of-course, we do have an option. From a very early age, infants develop an interesting reaction to anything unpleasant or threatening. If you watch a toddler for long enough, you will see that when the Baby is confronted with something unpleasant such as a bright light, or a stranger’s face which gets too close, or even a forkful of unwanted Spinach at dinner-time, if you watch the infant carefully you can note how a natural reaction to any unwanted, unpleasant, or threatening thing is to close your eyes. Because, in the mind of the child, if I can’t see it, it’s not there.

And if you think about it for any time at all, you'll see that this is what Jesus was saying about our world in the Gospel Lesson this morning. In John 16, The Lord tells us, "If I go [to be with The Father] I will send [The Holy Spirit] to you. And when He comes, He will prove the world wrong about sin, and righteousness, and judgment." (See Jn. 16:7b-8)

Can't you see this playing out right before our eyes? Nobody wants to admit sin. And if you close your eyes to the existence of God, and to the our profound broken-ness before such perfect majesty, if we close our eyes to our own unworthiness, then sin is really just optional.

And, if you close your eyes to the existence of God, you don't have to admit His Holiness. In fact, without a Holy God as a fixed reference point, everything works on a sliding scale, doesn't it? Without a Holy God, there are no real absolutes in life, and everything is relative. What's right for you maybe not quite so right for me. You see, it's just like the Gospel says, the world wants no truck with righteousness. People say, "That's much too discriminating a viewpoint to be healthy for our children. I'll decide what is right and wrong, thank you very much, not some God in heaven, and certainly not the Bible!"

And then there's the real kicker. Because the Gospel reading says that God and His Holy Spirit will prove the world wrong about sin, and righteousness, and finally about judgment. (See Jn.16:8-11) Are you aware of the huge number of people in this country who are quite willing to admit the existence of a God, but refuse to believe in the existence of Hell? They say, "As rational, advanced, and enlightened persons we're not going to go there. Oh yes, we'll grudgingly admit that this world must have been conceived and designed in all its intricacy by a Supreme Being. But surely there is no such thing, no such unpleasant consequence as judgment which awaits me when my journey here is through. I mean, what an archaic, barbarian idea!" You see, the world would have us adopt the mind of the infant, and close our eyes to such things.

So, how do we guard against falling into these traps of denial so common to this world? Augustine actually alluded to it earlier when he said that God is forever "leading the proud to be old without their knowledge." Because the most effective earthly tool we've been given to orient our lives toward the path God would have us walk is the wonderful gift of humility. When we come to understand not only our profound unworthiness before the Lord God, but also the fact that this Being of utter majesty chose to come down from the heights and gather us to himself, even in our woeful state of wretchedness, how can we feel anything else but utterly humbled and deeply loved? Our humility is, in many respects, the guide star along our walk home to be with The Lord. This humility is neither taught nor prized by the world in which we live. Yet, it is that character trait which more than any other earthly quality marks the believer. Humility is an effective guard against pride. To persist in being humble is the surest way to place yourself at the service of the Lord, and to find your place in His plan of redemption. Not to be served but to serve. To be God's humble servant.

And so, this day is the Day of Trinity. This day is the day that Our Precious Lord Jesus takes his rightful place on the Glorious Throne of Heaven, at the right hand of the Father. The Son, who for a time walked among us as this strange bearded wanderer, this man of mystery, the one we called by different names, Rabbi, Teacher, Messiah, The Christ, this Jesus has today returned to the Glorious City in all His Majesty. He has been revealed in might as the Son of the King. The forces of darkness have indeed been defeated. And the good news, the great good news is that He has graciously prepared a place for us at his side, *if* you and I for a little while longer in this world can just walk humbly with our God.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Trinity three in one...Amen.

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