

Trinity Sunday – May 30, 2010  
St. Mary's Church, Richmond VA  
Fr. Michael Renninger

My mom called me lots of names when I was growing up. SOME of those name are names that I can mention in Church this morning. Depending on circumstances, mom would call me Michael, or Mike, or Mikey. But when I was a child, I knew I was in trouble if my mom ever called me by my full name. If my mother ever called out – MICHAEL ANDREW RENNINGER!- that was NOT good.

You can tell an awful lot about who I am just from those three names. My first name, Michael, was chosen by my mother. Her Irish grandfather was named Michael. Mom wanted a name for her son that would reflect our Irish Catholic roots. My middle name, Andrew, is my father's middle name. He is Carl Andrew. In fact, my younger brother is also Karl Andrew. (And my mom is Mary *Ann*!) So, my middle name speaks of my relationship to my immediate family. My third name – Renninger – reflects my dad's German heritage. The Renningers came to Pennsylvania in 1756. They worked hard, and were very faithful Lutherans. My three names reveal a great deal about me. My names reflect the relationships that make me who I am.

On this feast of the Most Holy Trinity, we are reminded that we bear three *other* names. And these other three names tell us about the relationships which make us who we are. These names were not chosen for us by our moms and dads. These names were, quite literally, poured onto our foreheads when we were baptized. In just a few moments, we will see and hear that reality again, as we baptize the children who are in our midst today. We bear these names because we begin and end every formal prayer by marking these names onto our bodies. Father. Son. Holy Spirit.

Isn't it interesting that, like us, God has three names? Of all of the world's major religious traditions, we Christians are the only ones who make this astonishing claim. We say, on one hand, that we are monotheists – we believe in One God. With Jews, Muslims, and many others, we believe that God is One, and there is no other. But then, we Christians say, "Oh, by the way – that one God has three names – Father, Son, Holy Spirit- and God NEEDS three names, because God is three persons in one divine unity." Diversity in unity. Complexity in simplicity. The mystery of a COMMUNITY within the UNITY of God's own self.

I have learned, the hard way, that a homily on the feast of the Holy Trinity is not the place to try to answer every question about this theological mystery. Instead, I simply want to focus on one truth this morning; one truth, and its implications. I said earlier that my three names – Michael Andrew Renninger – tell you who I am BECAUSE THEY TELL YOU ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIPS WHICH MAKE ME WHO I AM. My three names tell you about my relationships – my mother's Irish Catholic family, my dad's German Lutheran farming family, my immediate family. In large part, I am who I am because of those relationships.

The same is true of the Holy Trinity. When we say that God has three names – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – we are groping for a language which allows us to explain an experience – we are groping for a language to explain that our God IS A GOD OF RELATIONSHIPS. Our God EXISTS to be in relationship the universe, with every living creature under heaven. Our God is one, but our God is also a community of relationships even in God's own self. Our God is constantly reaching out to us, sending his son to us, pouring the Spirit on us in baptism – because our three-personed God is a God defined by relationships. God wants no part of a universe in which we are down here sloggng thru life, and he is up there, somewhere, disinterested in the mess and mayhem of human life. Our God is, in God's own self, RELATIONSHIPS. The Father, loving the Son, loving the Spirit.

Our God wants a relationship with you. Father, Son, Spirit, loving Michael, Andrew, Renninger. God wants to relate to every messy, miniscule part, of my life, and yours.

That's the theological truth. But what about the implication? If God is, by definition, a relational God...then we will discover God, hear God, and learn more about God, in all of our relationships. This is the Christian genius, and the Christian challenge. We dare to say that we will catch glimpses of the God of the Universe in something as ordinary as our human relationships. This is why, for instance, we call marriage a sacrament. We believe that spouses will encounter God in the daily living, loving and forgiving, that happens in marriage. That God actually reveals himself to us through our beloved. A spouse is called to be a sacrament, a revelation of God's love, to the other spouse!

But not just in marriage: we Christians dare to say that parents, in their relationships with their children, reveal God to the next generation; That friends who stay faithful and generous are revealing the Triune God to one another; that employers who related to their employees with justice and respect are revealing God; that a young man who respects the chastity of his girlfriend is not just respecting her, but is also choosing to respect the God who created her; that enemies who learn to forgive are experiencing God in that moment of forgiveness; that a family who sits down to dinner together, laughing, talking, sharing stories, is encountering the Triune God as they build the bonds of love.

Seen in this light, no relationship in your life can be called "just ordinary." Every relationship you have – from the person you love most in the world to the woman you see every Thursday when you pick up your dry cleaning – every relationship in your life is a place where God can be found.

That is why, in the end, we Catholics spend so much time talking about the COMMUNITY of the church. We do not go to God alone. If God is a community of persons, then we must belong to a community of persons. We must be committed to the community of the church, to the civic community, to the human community. Jesus is not simply your PERSONAL Lord and Savior.

When I die, I am convinced that God will NOT say to me, “Mikey, it’s good to see you.”  
I suspect that, if I try to stay faithful to Christ, God will say, “Michael Andrew  
Renninger, welcome to heaven. *Now, who did you bring with you?*”