

[Readings: Proverbs 8:22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15]

About twenty years ago, a book came out called “The Shack.” It was such a popular book that a movie was made of it ten years later. The book was given to me by a friend to help me in my spiritual journey. And then I saw the movie. I’m not recommending that you see the movie. But if you do, a couple of disclaimers. First of all, some theological ideas offered in the book do not coincide with our Catholic theology. Secondly, there are characters presented in a controversial and challenging way. But the movie does have two powerful scenes that tie in to today’s Feast of the Holy Trinity.

The story focusses on Mac, the father of two young children who goes camping with his family at a nearby lake. An unspeakable tragedy happens involving his little girl, who is kidnapped, raped and in killed in a rundown shack not too far away. Several months after the tragedy, Mac receives a letter in the mailbox which sits at the edge of the street in a mound of freshly-fallen snow. Mac notices that there are no footprints in the snow, but that the mailbox door is open, and a white envelope rests within.

The envelope has a single sheet with the simple message, “Mac, meet me at the Shack. God.” Mac wrestles with the invitation and finally decides to go alone. As he arrives at the crime scene, traumatic memories and feelings boil over. He then sees a man who looks a lot like Jesus Christ, who invites Mac to his cottage own for a meal. As Mac enters the cottage, he sees two other people sitting with Jesus at the table – a large black woman and a slender Indian woman.

As the three sit and interact, Mac is impressed with the peace, joy and fraternity of the three. What a wonderful image of the indwelling of the Holy Trinity! At the end of the meal, Mac finally asks, “All right, which one of you is God?” All three answer: “I am!” The Most Holy Trinity is revealed!

As the story progresses, Mac begins to relate to each of them. They help Mac come to healing, reconciliation, and peace. When Mac asks Papa why she doesn’t look like God the Father, she replies, “Because you have Daddy Issues you haven’t resolved yet. You can’t see me as a father. But you will.”

Each one of the Trinity in their own way are able to touch Mac’s pain, to feel his pain, and to restore his broken relationship with God. It is a beautiful image of The Trinity all working to love us.

We know the Lord is with us the whole time. That is what Mac discovers in this Trinitarian experience. He discovers that we have this most gracious God. Even in moments of darkness and struggle.

St. Paul reminds us of this in today's Second Reading: "Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

What do YOU do when YOU feel overwhelmed, perhaps after experiencing a traumatic event or receiving bad news? We certainly are getting an extra portion of bad news every day, aren't we?

Jesus had the insight to realize that His followers were about to be traumatized by His Crucifixion, so He promises them further guidance by way of the Spirit once they could "bear" to hear it. It is important for us to know when we need some healing time BEFORE moving forward, especially when confronted with loss or setback.

Truth is often unbearable, as Jesus himself noted to his disciples. A 90-year-old friend of mine likes to say, "If you knew everything that was going to happen to you from the beginning, you'd slit your throat." In the movie, "O, God," George Burns, who plays God, is asked by John Denver, who plays a grocery store clerk, to know everything about his own life. God says, "You couldn't take it all in if you knew everything." Decades later, in the movie, "A Few Good Men," Jack Nicholson tells Tom Cruise, "You can't handle the truth!"

This could be a pessimistic outlook, but it's certainly true that we often look back at things we've been through and are grateful we didn't know all the details up front, right? Too much information too soon can be discouraging even to the most courageous heart.

We have to grow into wisdom simultaneously with the grace necessary to understand it, as Jesus did. Only then can we discover the truth about ourselves: that we are stronger, braver, and more heroic than we ever dreamed possible. Another way of saying this is that the indwelling Spirit of God is more accessible to us than we may think. If we foreclose on our futures too soon, we miss the vast potential of God to be God in us.

The truth is not always unbearable. Sometimes it is reason to dance, as Wisdom demonstrates in Proverbs. God frontloaded creation with nothing but goodness, and though we've managed to pack a lot of evil into human history, that does not diminish the

goodness still available. The Spirit of Truth is prepared to lead us straight to the best of this world, if we are prepared to follow.

Back to “The Shack.” I love the character in the movie, Papa. She is a very gracious and loving woman. She says over and over again throughout the movie to Mac, “Mac, I’m especially fond of you.” Any time anybody’s name is mentioned, she says, “You know, I’m especially fond of that person.” Mac finally says, “Is there anyone you’re not especially fond of?” Then God the Father says, “Haven’t found them yet.”

We have this God that is especially fond of you and me. He is so gracious to us. God the Father is so gracious. Jesus is so gracious. The Holy Spirit is so gracious. They are all just spilling out with grace for us.

God wants to welcome all of us to the table of the Lord. Ultimately, this is the table where you get to experience the graciousness of God. The kindness of God. God who is slow to anger and rich in mercy. Right here, we get to experience the love of the Trinity.

As Mac grapples with trying to get to know each one, there is a scene in the movie where he sits next to Jesus. He said “Listen, I feel comfortable with you. I am not sure about those two yet.” I think it is true with all of us. We tend to have a more comfortable connection with a person of the Trinity. My invitation to you is to see who you are more comfortable with. God sent His only Son into the world to reveal the Father to us so we can truly know, once and for all, what God is like. Reflect on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What your relationship is like with each one of them. If you notice that one is weaker, to ask God to help you grow in that. I myself feel most strongly connected to the Holy Spirit. I’m pretty good with Jesus. But I’m still working out my own Daddy Issues with the Father! That is the whole essence of liturgy and of prayer. I invite you to reconnect and to have that deeper relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. AMEN!