

Proper 16 B
August 26th, 2018
John 6:56-69
St. George's Episcopal Church
Fr. Chris

A Little Bit of Soul

“It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Human beings reflect the Trinitarian structure of God's Being. We have three specific parts, three “identities”, yet we are one being. One in being with our God. We often identify with one of these identities as “who we are”.

There is the body. We live in this veil of flesh all the time. We look in the mirror and we identify with the body looking back at us. Meet others at the store, the coffee shop or at work, and they recognize us by seeing our familiar body. We sense the world around us through our bodies. We see with it. We hear with them. We feel things with our body. We taste food on our tongues. So we identify ourselves with the body we are living in.

But, I ask, are we not more than the body? Jesus ponders this in Matthew 6:25: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” Our bodies age day by day. We know that one-day, they will wear out and we must leave them. We watch this truth in the changing of the seasons each year. But nature does not go out of existence when Winter comes! The fallen leaves will nurture new life in the Spring, and their existence protects the new life as it grows up from the ground. Are we not more than our bodies and our clothes? Yes we are. But then there is the mind. Hard to separate that from who we are. We cannot imagine future life without a mind. Well, ...look at me: I have been mindless without a mind for years, and I still exist.

Our minds think and remember stuff, and much of that stuff is at the core of our lives and who we perceive that we are. Our very identity as individuals is contained in our minds. When we interact with others, our responses come from our minds. Our minds direct our bodies to reach out and clasp the hands of others or embrace them affectionately, spreading our joy and love to them. Inside our

mind is the ego, and with this fellow, we identify who we are. But are we who the ego says we are? What if the ego tells us we are better than others? Is that true? More often, the ego tells us we are not as worthy as others, is that true? We know our mind can play tricks on us. We know also how hard it is to change feelings of pride or unworthiness, especially when they start effecting the rest of our lives. We can work for years to change them. Yet the ego does not speak for our heart, nor is it the seat of our faith in God. If it were, we could live in a state of bliss and peace and love. Instead, we long for those things in our deepest selves.

Then there is the spirit or ‘soul.’

This is the tricky one, because soul is not always apparent to us, and we may wonder whether we even have one as our identity is so wrapped up in the body and the mind, we cannot imagine living without these things. Yet it is our soul that animates the mind and the body. The soul is a gift and the spark of life from God without which, we do not exist. Some plumb the depths of their being in prayer and meditation. While watching the breath of life breathe in and out of us, we can begin to realize that “we” are more than merely the body or just in the mind. Together they make up who we are as we walk about this earth, and without all three, we are not human beings. We are merely dust cast in the wind. Our soul is who we are, and it is our soul that is eternal and will return to our God and the other souls we have known in our life now gone before us. In this reunion we will find a peace and bliss we can only taste briefly in this existence.

Our Scriptures are full of references to the soul. If you are interested, look them up in a Bible Concordance on line. So the topic of the soul is of great importance to believers down through the ages, and much thought and experience is there to be shared with those who search. Three passages, if my time permits, stood out to me and I would like to share them with you:

- The soul is quiet and a place of peace within us, waiting for God, longing to return. In Psalm 62 we hear the famous words: “For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.”
- Nowhere in sacred Scripture is the Trinitarian character of our being expressed so clearly as in Matthew 22:37 and its parallels in the other Gospels: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first great commandment of God. We are to love with all parts of our being, not merely one part.
- Because there is also the spark of the spirit of God within us from the time of our Baptism, Saint Paul writes to us in I Thessalonians 5:23: “May the God of peace

himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is interesting that soul and spirit are mentioned in the same sentence. The words are often interchangeable. For our purposes here, let us think of the soul as the life force which animates you and the spirit of God which gives you eternal life. So it is that the soul continues to live on when we die. The soul is the seat of our true identity, and hidden in the soul is either a good or bad spirit. The good soul seeks out others and their well-being, while the bad soul is primarily concerned with itself.

A lifeless, non-animated body often does not look like the person we knew. It is clear that the person is gone and we must move on and let go, wish and try as we might to hold on.

The spirit and soul animate us. Without a soul, we are but walking, animated shells, a shadow of what we once were or could be. “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”
AMEN!