

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 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 Most 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 fresh 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 for a meal. As Mac enters the cottage, he sees two other people sitting with Jesus at the table. One is called Papa, but looks like a large black woman. The other person at the table is a woman who looks like she is from India or Pakistan. She is the Holy Spirit. 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! Mac asks, "All right, which one of you is God?" All three answer: "I am!"

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 he 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, Who relates to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I love the character in the movie, Papa. She is a very gracious and loving woman. She says repeatedly 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 him yet."

We have this God that is especially fond of you. He is so gracious to you. 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 you. 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, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

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, 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!

Because today is Father's Day, I share with you a comment about fatherhood written by Dr. Greg Popcak, a family counsellor and psychiatrist.

Canada made news recently for its new rules forbidding government workers from using "gender-biased" terms like "mother" and "father" when conducting official business. What used to be honorable titles for thousands of years are now considered "gender-biased." In the United States, there is a growing movement encouraging the use of "Parent 1" and "Parent 2" on birth certificates.

In this brave new world, it would seem that our culture has decided that it is well past time to proclaim motherhood and fatherhood to be indistinguishable and interchangeable. This would all be well and good if science wasn't consistently showing that fathers and mothers bring different gifts to the parenting table and that children raised in households without one or the other do not fare as well as children raised in homes with both. Fortunately, although it may no longer be politically correct to do so, it is at least still legal to celebrate Father's Day. It might be a good idea to take advantage of this freedom while it still exists, and reflect on what science says about why dads matter.

The presence of an involved, caring father significantly decreases the risk of delinquency and substance abuse in adolescent boys. Mothering gives children the ability to tolerate stress more effectively, nurturing fathers give a greater capacity to regulate aggression.

Children who have a close relationship with an involved father are twice as likely to go to college and find stable employment after high school

as those children who do not have a loving father in their lives. Together, moms' and dads' unique gifts help kids develop a full range of skills.

The science is clear. Mothers and fathers are not interchangeable, nor are they replaceable. The loss of a mother or a father is devastating, and the benefits lost by the absence of a parent of either gender simply cannot be made up for by filling that space with another caregiver of the same gender. That isn't a judgment on the nurturing skills of that same-gendered caregiver. It's just science. It turns out that Mother Nature simply doesn't care about gender politics, no matter how much progressive culture warriors try to re-educate her.

So, even if it causes our too-hip-for-science friends to scowl at us, this Father's Day, let's celebrate the uniqueness of dads and rejoice in all the ways fatherhood is a blessing to our children. I conclude with these eight thank-you notes given by children to their fathers. The children range in age from grade school to adults.

Thank you, Dad, for giving your all at work and at home.

Thank you, Dad, for making sure we have everything we need.

Thank you, Dad, for leading our family in the ways of the Lord.

Thank you, Dad, for teaching us about Jesus.

Thank you, Dad, for making our home a place we want to be.

Thank you, Dad, for showing us how to fight hard and finish well.

Thank you, Dad, for helping us up when we fall.

Thank you, Dad, for believing in us and for being our #1 fan. AMEN!

A Prayer for Father's Day

Loving God, we ask your blessings upon all fathers.

May they be inspired by your mercy, wisdom, strength and selfless love.

For new fathers with new responsibilities;

For fathers awaiting the birth of a child;

For those who are tired, facing challenges, stressed or depressed;

For those balancing work and family;

For those whose children have physical, mental, or emotional disabilities;

For those who raise their children on their own;

For those who struggle to feed their children due to poverty;

For those who are a father to the children of others;

For those who have lost a child;

For those whose desire to be a father has not been fulfilled;

For grandfathers, uncles, godfathers, and those who are like a father;

For spiritual fathers and priests;

For those who have a strained relationship or whose father is absent;

For those whose children have left home;

For fathers who have died; For those who have lost their father;

Bless all fathers, that their love may be deep; that they may be filled with the strength, courage, and perseverance needed to lead their families and to lead their children to know what is good. Through the intercession of St. Joseph, may all fathers be blessed this day and always. Through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

[Readings: Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Luke 9:11b-17]

This Sunday, fittingly, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus, the U.S. bishops will officially conclude the three-year-long celebration. The National Eucharistic Revival. Dioceses and parishes across the country held special Eucharistic processions. Masses, Holy Hours and festivals to celebrate what we know to be true: that Jesus Christ is present with us today and always -- Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity -- in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

A Catholic author, Flannery O'Connor, wrote this many decades ago: "I realize now that this is all I will ever be able to say about [the Eucharist], except that it is the center of existence for me."

How many of us can say with Flannery O'Connor that the Eucharist "is the center of existence for me?" Would our children, our fellow parishioners, our co-workers, our friends say that this is true of us?

In the end, the success of the National Eucharistic Revival depends not on the bishops, but on each one of us. The more deeply we encounter Christ in the Eucharist, the more our lives will reflect that encounter.

Saint Luke calls the Eucharist "the breaking of the bread." Saint Paul calls it "the supper of the Lord." Jesus says it is "the new covenant in His Body and Blood." Most of us use the words "Holy Communion" or "Most Blessed Sacrament." Pope Francis said that the Eucharist is not an award for good behavior, but medicine for the sick. None of us is worthy to have the Lord, "Come under our roof" as we say before receiving Holy Communion.

Our three Readings today speak of the progression of our understanding of the Most Holy Eucharist.

It is prefigured by Melchizedek. It is specified by St. Paul. It is expanded in today's Gospel. Jesus feeds us and then tells us to feed others. "Give us this day our daily bread" means we ask God not only to feed our bodies, but to feed our souls, and to be Christ for one another. To strive, to celebrate and to serve.

However you describe it, Eucharist is the centerpiece of the Catholic Christian experience. Especially as the Real Presence of Jesus. WHAT is the "Real Presence? That means that Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist in His Body and Blood, Humanity and Divinity, under the form of bread and wine. Really!

Someone – an atheist – once said, "If you Catholics really believed in the Real Presence, you would come up and receive Communion on your hands and knees!" He has more of an understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist than most of us believers!

There are other special words that speak of what we do when we have Eucharistic Adoration. I would like to take the words common to Adoration and apply them to what happens AFTER we leave here, WHEN we encounter one another, HOW we become, how we bring and how WE can be the Real Presence to our world. The words are Exposition, Adoration and Benediction.

First, **Exposition**. We expose ourselves for who we really and truly are. Psychologists say that we are an emotional Holy Trinity: the public person we display to others; the private person we display to our more intimate family and friends, and the person we are afraid to show to anyone for fear of guilt, shame, or misunderstanding.

When we expose ourselves in our vulnerability, when we let others see us as God sees us and knows us, we can acknowledge that we are all

of one family and are all redeemed, saved, by the merciful peace and righteousness of God. Exposition.

Second, **Adoration**. Picture it. The Golden Girls. Dorothy and her mother are sitting on the couch watching TV. But Dorothy is gazing with love in her eyes at her mother. She just sits and stares. Finally, Sophia says, "What are you doing?" Dorothy says, "Nothing, Ma. Just looking at you and loving you." And Sophia says, "Well stop doing that. I've been wanting to pick my nose for the last five minutes!"

Parents, do you look lovingly at your children on a regular basis? Or do they see only judgement and criticism? Spouses, do you still look at each other with love in your eyes? That's adoration. What do you do during Eucharistic Adoration? Sit quietly and let the **Son** shine in your soul, as Sr. Pat often says. Have a silent conversation with the Lord. Pray your favorite prayers. Bring to mind all the blessings you have and give thanks. Or just sit in silence. Adoration.

Finally, **Benediction**. Blessing. We are blessed by the monstrance, which is a holder for the Blessed Sacrament in the form of the priest's host. The word monstrance means to display, to show. In our case, it means to make real what we celebrate within these walls.

Pope Francis says the simplest ways we do this is when we perform the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. We can and must do this in public, in our homes, in our communities, in our country.

In all of these ways, WE become a benediction, a blessing, to all those around us. That's one of the reasons why we have Eucharistic Processions in neighborhoods: to bring the Body of Christ into the world physically and sacramentally. Benediction.

My first Christmas away from home was in Vienna, Austria, when I was studying in Rome. We arrived at the local seminary an hour before all the stores closed on Christmas Eve. We rushed to buy food, essentials, and souvenirs.

Later on that night, we went to the Cathedral for Midnight Mass. In the two side choir lofts across from each other, a trumpet group played, “Lo, How a Rose e’re Blooming” and the voice choir on the other side responded. Still brings tears to my eyes whenever I hear that song.

Then we returned to the seminary to lay out our purchases on a small table. A little pink pig dessert cake for good luck. An elaborate red ribbon. A loaf of bread. A bottle of red wine. A candle. We lit the candle, joined hands and sang Silent Night. Then, we shared the bread and wine. So on that Christmas Eve, 1979, four American seminarians celebrated two very different “Holy Communion” in one night!

Exposition, Adoration, Benediction. Expose, adore, and bless. Try it. You’ll like it! AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 12:1-11; Ps. 34; 12 Tim. 4:6-8, 17-18; Matt. 16:13-19]

It's not often that a human being is big enough to trump a Sunday observance! But the two men we honor today do just that; Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and John the Baptist are the only two others with the liturgical clout to do the same. Consider that Saints Peter and Paul, taken together, *are* the Church. That is, they embody two significant aspects of the Church that incorporate the whole and cannot be separated without losing something vital. Those aspects might be defined as action and reason. Peter is a doer, a man of action, and Paul is a thinker, the philosopher. One trait isn't much good without the other.

Peter, the man of action, operates on a hair-trigger of responsiveness whenever a challenge arises. A preacher passes along the shoreline and says, "Come follow me" -- and Peter is gone before the boat is sufficiently docked. Peter drops his nets into the water upon the Lord's command even after a night of fruitless efforts, dragging in a miracle catch as a result. He leaps into the water and tries to walk across its surface because Jesus invites him to. In today's Gospel, he blurts out: "You are the Christ," which is a very dangerous thing to say in Roman-occupied Israel.

Peter is the disciple who draws a sword when Jesus is ambushed on Holy Thursday at the Garden of Gethsemane; a servant's ear is sacrificed before Jesus calls him off. Peter swears impulsively that he will never, ever deny his Lord -- and then denies him three times before the night is out. Three days later, after the Resurrection of Jesus Peter runs at once to the tomb because of a report that it's empty. He will soon leap from a boat and swim to shore at a sighting of Jesus.

On Pentecost Sunday, The Holy Spirit hardly rushes into the upper room in tongues of fire before Peter is out in the street, telling what he knows to the astonished morning crowds. Peter rarely thinks things through. He acts -- and his impulsive actions are both courageous and sometimes premature. Which is where St. Paul comes in.

Paul is a scholar: a man of law, philosophy, and debate. He spent the first half of his life contemplating right action according to the school of the Pharisees. This led him to the decision to persecute Christians, which was the only logical conclusion. But then an experience "on the road" to Damascus derails Paul's rational convictions. Jesus Christ can do that to a person. Paul knows that theological reflection can sometimes change the course you're on completely. After this humbling experience Paul spends three years in an OCIA-like process of formation.

We know that in the Bible, some people name are changed because they are given a new mission, a new vision, a new purpose in life. Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah. Simon becomes Peter. Saul becomes Paul.

Trivia question. When did this happen? For Simon Peter, it was in today's Gospel. For Paul, it didn't happen once and for all on the road to Damascus. He is called Saul another twelve times in the Acts of the Apostles.

Paul continues to think his way through the Judeo-Christian conundrum. How do you reconcile the demands of divine law and divine mercy? How do you live in the Kingdom while remaining in the world? Paul hits the pause button on Peter's relentless action.

Friends, you and I are called, just like Saints Peter and Paul, to be

people of action and people of reflection. Neither one is perfect, and neither are we. God doesn't call the equipped, God equips those He calls!

This week's questions: What prisons in your life still hold you captive? What sin keeps you double chained and longing for freedom?

"Put on your cloak and follow me," the angel says to Saint Peter. Peter, the rock, was in chains -- but freed! "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith": inspirational and challenging words from Saint Paul. Are you "competing well" in your daily living? Do you "keep the faith?" Who is your rock, your foundation in life? Who inspires you? Jesus is your protection, your strength, and your guide.

Help Him build His Church. AMEN!