Dear People Whom God Loves,

**CHRIST**

I preface this reflection by making it clear that I believe in our doctrines of Creation, the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. These doctrines are the words our church uses to pass on the mystical experience of the early followers of Jesus. The words, of course, are not the experience but they have been able to help people of many generations to enter into the experience or at least to hold on to it without entering into experience at much depth.

I

I find it helpful to listen to the scriptures that trace the experience of the early followers of Jesus as they struggled to reconcile their belief – as faithful Jews – with what they experienced in Jesus. As strict monotheists they held fast to their belief that there is only one God who is separate from the world and the people that God created. At the same time their experience of Jesus revealed to them that God was intimate to them and the world. This closeness of God was also experienced in the Jewish tradition. I do think that the experience they had of Jesus gave them more insight.

This eventually gave rise to our doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. Three divine persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – yet one God. This was not a math question about how one can be three and three one. This doctrine is passing on to us their experience that God is other than us and our world and at the same time intimate to us and our world. (They had no notion of the cosmos that we have today.)

II

Here are the scripture passages that I have pondered that help me to understand a little better what our doctrines are passing on.

JN 1: 1-4. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life and this life was the light of the human race.” I can see the beginning of what becomes our doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. The Son (Word) was with God and the Son (Word) was God. Sameness and separation at the same time. This is mystery. I see the mystery pointing to the beautiful truth that the one God who is other is also intimate to us. Creation came through the Son. This was long before Jesus was born. This tells me that we should not confine the work of the Son to the years when Jesus walked on our earth. The Son brought life to the human race. That we be saved and made whole was what God always wanted. I see salvation as being drawn into the love and mercy that makes us more closely resemble the love and mercy that God is. To phrase this another way. This says to me that the one God who is other than the world and us humans is also intimate with us and the world and wants our salvation.

JN 1:9. “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” The true light was a reality before Jesus was born. Since the Son was in the world before Jesus was born, it might be helpful to think of the word Christ as referring not only to Jesus but also to all of the working in creation.

JN 1:14. “And the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And we saw his glory the glory as of the Father’s only Son full of grace and truth.” It is truly God who is in Jesus. This mysterious union – that is beyond our understanding – is expressed by saying that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. It also says to me that God loves us so much that God wanted to walk our human journey. More than trying to understand just how this works I find it valuable to let it soak into my soul how much we are loved, held and cherished by the Love we name God.

JN 1-18. “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him.” This says to me that if we want to learn what God is like and how God wants us to live, we must see how Jesus lived and taught. When he taught his disciples to pray, he taught them to say: Our Father (Abba). Jesus saw Abba as a loving parent to him and to others. He saw the total embrace of God for everyone. His Father made the sun rise on the bad and the good. God saw the value of every human being. We must be careful not to lessen in our hearts the infinite LOVE we call God. He told parables to show what Abba was like. The loving merciful father who only wanted his wayward son back home safe and sound. The shepherd who searches for the sheep that wandered away. The woman who is frantically searching for the lost coin that she needed to feed her children.

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What was pleasing to God was Jesus’ willingness to continue his mission of spreading the good news of what God is like even though Jesus realized at some point that it would lead to his crucifixion. (Jesus was condemned a revolutionary. He actually was not a revolutionary. He was not like the zealots who wanted to get rid of the Romans by force. The Romans had crucified hundreds of revolutionaries before Jesus.) God was pleased by Jesus’s willingness to continue his mission to the end. God was not pleased that Jesus had to suffer. It seems to me that when we suffer, God suffers. I know that our human words can’t really express what is going on in God. But I think that they point to something that is going on in God.

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To recall a crucial thing about Jesus. He embraced the outcasts of his society and religion. The society and religion of Jesus were closely interwoven. He embraced the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the sinners, the adulterous, and the lepers. Instead of ostracizing and condemning them, he understood and loved them. This love and acceptance allowed them to become open to the transforming love that God is. Jesus doesn’t tell them to get good and then he will love them. Rather he loved them into goodness. His acceptance came before the change. How often we say that we believe in Jesus and do not follow him!

COL 1:15. “He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation.” Note from the New American Bible:“…they present Christ as the mediator of creation…” Again using the word Christ as God present in creation from the beginning.

REV 1:4-18. The following is portions from these verses:

“John, to the seven churches in Asia…and from Jesus Christ…I am the Alpha and the Omega….and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man...he touched me with his right hand and said: “Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever’.” I find it helpful to me to use the word Christ to refer to the interaction of the Son with all of creation from the beginning and forever. I do believe in the greater depth of the Son in Jesus. I don’t pretend to understand how all this works. I am just drawn into the immense graciousness that God is.

EPH 4:13. “Until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ.” I believe that we are all called to be drawn into the divinization that is called the full stature of Christ. Though not in the same way as Jesus. That is why we have Jesus saying that he will send the Holy Spirit. That is why we speak of the Incarnation when speaking of Jesus and we speak of the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit when speaking of us. God in everyone and everything.

I COR 15:22. “For just as in Adam all die so too in Christ shall all be brought to life.” What I see is that our union with Christ who lives in us brings us to eternal life. We are gradually transformed until we are drawn into the state of complete love and peace. That is the state which we have named heaven.

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MT 25:40. “And the king will say to them in reply ‘Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did it for me’.” Since Christ lives in each one of us, whatever we do to each other or to ourselves we do it to Christ.

ROM 16:25. “Now to him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept for long ages.” Note in the New American Bible “Paul’s gospel reveals the mystery kept secret for long ages; justification and salvation through faith, with all the implication for Jews and Gentiles that Paul has developed in the letter”. My Note: The LOVE we name GOD has been active in our universe since the Big Bang.

III

It helps me to image God not as an entity or a being – not even a supreme being – but as real and active love. We might think of God as loving energy but more subtle than physical energy. There is physicality in us beings and we are able to cause something to happen. Since God is love, there is no physicality in God. Also there was nothing for God to work with. This means that the way God works is different from the way beings work. We are not able to compare God’s working in our world and the universe with the way we work. This helps me with questions like –why doesn’t God stop wars and other bad things from happening. Since we can’t compare God’s working in creation with the way we work, God’s working will always be mysterious and beyond our control.

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Why pray? First of all I see prayer as being willing to be open to have God change us and not to change God. Secondly, I see the openness of prayer as providing the space for God (LOVE) to work in a way that does not interfere with the freedom of us and the rest of the universe. To put it another way. Remember – the power of love is not the same as the power of force. Fortunately, we can be open to God’s working. This happens when in prayer we are willing (at least to some degree) for God to work in God’s way rather than our way. This often means that we will be drawn into deeper love and compassion. I also believe that God also helps us to be willing without taking away our freedom.

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To continue with our transformation.

This transformation can come when in prayer or otherwise we are open and willing (at least to some degree) for LOVE (GOD) to transform us in whatever way LOVE (GOD) sees is good. My experience is that what is good in the big picture is often not what I want or what I see is good. I can only trust. This transformation can come from our participation in the sacraments. The loving divine presence is there. Our part is to be willing to allow that presence to transform us. Also transformation can take place when we do works of kindness to relieve the suffering and needs of other people and when people are kind to us. It is also essential that we do it out of compassion and our desire to relieve the suffering and not for any kind of reward or recognition that we might receive. As we are open God helps us to have that compassion. God even helps us to be open because we don’t like the vulnerability of being open.

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This openness to being transformed into more loving people is not confined to taking place through church or religion. It can take place whenever we are open to the goodness that surrounds us. This can happen in our awareness of nature and allow its beauty to sink in. It can happen when we look at a tiny child (especially one that is dear to us) and allow that love to enter into us. This can also happen through music and other arts when we just let the beauty penetrate us.

Beauty is goodness shining through. We just need to let it enter our soul. God is beautiful because God is good. God is good because in ways we often don’t understand, God is always drawing us into love and compassion. The presence of GOD (LOVE) is subtle and mysterious. Fortunately, God is also patient. All GOD (LOVE) wants us that we find the happiness and peace that comes with our growing in love, compassion and mercy.

IV

The Son of God (the Word) is God but not the Father – GOD is truly in the human being Jesus. This is why Jesus is properly called Christ. This is why we say that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. This seems reasonably clear to me from pondering the scriptures and also this was the spiritual (mysterious) experience of the early followers of Jesus. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us is real and is the presence of God in us. When I try to put the Blessed Trinity into words (which of course is impossible), I think this way: God is who God is and is other than us. At the same time, God who is other is living and acting in all creatures.

Smile, God Loves You,

Father Clay