

"The Fourth Person of the Trinity"

In 2008 I was flying into Dallas. As we approached, the usual things happened. The pilot announced that we had begun our initial descent and would be on the ground in twenty minutes. An attendant reminded us to discontinue the use of large portable electronic devices and return seatbacks to their upright position. The rumble of landing gear machinery filled the cabin.

A number of minutes passed quite normally, and then the plane began to ascend. The pilot came back on the speaker to explain that there was a problem with one of the landing gears. Either it was not descending, or the sensor that sends the information to the cockpit was malfunctioning. They didn't know which it was. And the solution was to make another pass by the airport, flying low enough that someone with binoculars in the control tower might be able to see whether the wheels were up or down.

I'm sure that in 2016 there are cameras for this. Our cars have cameras for backing up and I can watch our parishioners' high school lacrosse games on my phone, so I hope we're taking advantage of this technology to safely land planes.

So we made a second—much scarier—descent into Dallas Fort Worth. And when the pilot spoke to us next it was to report that the folks in the control tower really couldn't tell what our landing gear situation was. I'm not sure what difference it made. Did we have a backup plan? With or without the wheels, we had to land. But boy was it scary not knowing. Everybody held hands. Some people made forbidden phone calls to whisper "I love you." The flight attendants didn't try to stop them. Maybe they were making calls too.

When the wheels softly touched the runway, we broke into cheers and applause. Strangers hugged. The pilot tried his best to tell us about the local time as if this had been a perfectly normal flight.

Perhaps you too have experienced something like this—one of those moments that exposes the lie of our separateness, our apparent divisions.

It is in such moments that our true nature is revealed. We who are many are one. Created in the image of God, we must reflect the nature of God who is both three and one. We are part of the Trinity. Father Richard Rohr calls us—you and me—the fourth person of the Trinity. This is, of course, bad math. And I'm sure there are many Christians who would call it bad theology, maybe even heresy.

But is Rohr's assertion that we are part of the Trinity is no more radical than what Jesus told his disciples about the Holy Spirit, "he abides with you, and he will be in you." (John 14:17)

No more radical than Paul writing to the Corinthians, "we have the mind of Christ."

No more radical than the words of our own prayer book: "Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being."

We live in God the Father. We possess the mind of God the Son. God the Holy Spirit abides within us.

However we count the persons of the Trinity, our scripture and tradition affirm that we are included. And so today we celebrate not some distant theological concept, but the very foundation of our identity.

We catch glimpses of this reality in moments of crisis, when we're not sure the plane will land. We see it here—week after week—in the Eucharist, the bread that is broken a reminder that the same Life lives in each us.

And sometimes it's just an ordinary part of a regular day. On Friday night, I was sitting on the couch by an open window. One of my neighbors pulled up in his black sports car. The bass from his stereo shook my chest. Our neighbors across the street are four or five men in their twenties, who share a home. They drive sporty cars and come and go all hours of the day and night, music blasting.

I have to confess that I've never felt much of a connection to them. The young man got out of the car, and the first thing he said was, "Hey kitty, where you at?" He was

calling I realized for my cat, Jan. He said it again "Hey kitty, where you at?" And suddenly I felt such an affinity with this stranger who loves the same cat I love.

The image I want to leave you with comes from a summer afternoon many years ago. My brother and I were throwing a Frisbee on the town common in Amherst, Massachusetts. There's a place there on the common where Greyhound buses drop off passengers, and as we were throwing, a bus pulled up.

As I happened to turn and look, I witnessed the moment when a man, standing about 50 yards away caught sight of a woman stepping off the bus. I've never seen someone run with such purpose in my whole life. I felt their hug as surely as if I had been sandwiched between them.

Why do experiences of reunion, return, homecoming have such a powerful effect on us? Perhaps it is a recognition of Trinity, of our essence, that we are created in the image of God who is one and three—who is all at once the recognition of the beloved other, stepping off the bus, and the rush of love that pulls them toward each other, and the embrace in which they are one again. We who are many are one.

Individual expressions of the one life. The fourth member of the Trinity.