

# YEAR OF FAITH 2012-2013

## 32nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME | November 10-11, 2012

In the movie "Into the Wild," a young man named Christopher McCandless decides to leave everyone and everything behind to make his way around the country. He has just graduated from college and decides to cut up his credit cards, give away his money and head out to live a completely unencumbered life. The movie follows him for two years as he picks up odd jobs here and there and meets all sorts of interesting people. Finally, he makes it to the great destination that his heart had been set on, the Alaskan wilderness. There he hunts, fishes, swims and in his isolation is content to live off the land. At first this seems like all he's ever wanted.

Like many others have found, nature can also at times seem harsh and surviving in isolation is not all it was cracked up to be. Chris longs to be among his family and friends and makes a decision to get back to them as soon as he can. Unfortunately, as the Alaskan weather turns brutal, Chris is held up in an abandoned school bus used as makeshift lodging during the hunting season. With no way to escape and his food supply dwindling, Christopher sees that his life is coming to an end. In those last days with the pains of hunger and the stinging cold, he writes one of the last things he would ever write, "Happiness [is] only real when [it is] shared."

What Christopher finds out at the end of his life is probably one of the most profound and important lessons any person can learn. All the good things in life, all the joys, excitement and happiness in life is so much sweeter, so much more enjoyable when it is shared with others. The converse is also true. The difficult things in life, the heartaches and disappointments are so much easier to bear when we have others around us to bear those burdens with us.

Why is this so? Why do we, like Christopher, long for communion with others? I would like to suggest that this is not just simply for convenience or survival but rather because we were made in the image and likeness of God who is intimate communion. As Catholics, we believe that though God is one, this one God is a community, a communion of persons. Although they are indivisible, they are three distinct persons united in a bond of love and who are love itself. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. Each is unique but not isolated from the other.

This mystery of our faith is sometimes difficult to wrap our heads around. There is however a beautiful icon that helps to express what this means. It is the Icon of the Holy Trinity by Andre Rublev, a Russian Iconographer. In this icon, the Trinity is seen as three men sitting together around a circular table sharing a meal. Each looks identical with slight variations in what they are wearing. There are interesting features that tell the story of the Trinity as Community of Persons in love.

First, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are gathered together around the table. We see this desire to be with one another often in the New Testament. We hear Jesus being led by the Holy Spirit into the desert and seeking time away to be alone with the Father in prayer. The Three are always together, always united and what more profound way to show this than through the sharing of a meal?

Gathered around the table, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are identical in appearance, this shows that each is equal to the other. In their hands, they hold the same staff of authority which shows that they are equal in authority. Yet, the Son and the Holy Spirit have their heads bowed toward the Father. This shows that, although they are equal, the Son and the Holy Spirit willingly and lovingly submit themselves to the will of the Father. There is no fighting for authority or power over the other. Each is fully who they are and lovingly embrace the role of the other.

Next, the Son's role is seen in the offering on the table, a symbol of the Eucharist, Christ's self offering to the Father on our behalf. The Father's hand is pointing to the offering. Jesus offers his whole self to the Father for us and the Father lovingly embraces that gift.

Finally, the Spirit is seen with his hand pointing to the empty place at the table. It is the Spirit working on us and within us that calls us forward to share in the sacrificial meal Christ has prepared for us here and in the life to come.

There's so much more that could be said about this icon and even more about the depths of God's self. Yet, these small insights from Rublev help us to understand our own nature, made in God's image and likeness. This longing to be with one another, to share in each other's life is fundamental to who we are and how we are made. Yet, at times, we seek other models for our families and communities.

In the Trinity, however, is where we find what it really means to be with one another and there in Him, we find the key to the proper ordering of the Church and society.

In the Holy Trinity, we find the source of our own internal desire and need for communion with one another and with Him. There, in Him, we find an equality that is willing to submit to rightful authority out of love and an authority exercised in love and for love. In the Holy Trinity we see uniqueness and an embracing of roles by the Three who neither wish to be nor are anyone other than who they are. And, finally, in the Three who are One, we find a total self-giving love of each to the other. They hold nothing back from one another. They are total self-gift for love of the other. They are Love itself.

Brothers and sisters, imagine if our family life, our community life, our world were modeled on Him. Christopher in our opening story realized that happiness is real only when it is shared. How true that is. We are made to share and the Holy Trinity is both the source and model of real and lasting happiness that is found in true communion.