

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity – A – Saint Anselm Abbey
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REUNIONS, EVEN in a coronavirus pandemic, are times folks reminisce. People start talking about this prof or that coach. They recall good times at Wa-toy, Verani's or the Red Arrow. As events are told and retold, we and our friends become heroes, knights in shining armor, masters of classroom repartee, lions in the lab or stars on the court. Reunion stories must be a genre of imaginative narrative, ranking just below science fiction and above Reader's Digest anecdotes.

Today is not only our annual Reunion Alumni Mass at Saint Anselm, it is also the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. Trinity Sunday asks a preacher to address the basis of our faith in the One Living God who reveals himself in salvation history as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the feast when metaphysics matters, when the Church reflects on the unique divine essence shining forth in three distinct Persons, who are not persons in any way that we poor creatures actually understand. We employ images to wrap our heads around One, utterly transcendent and truly immanent, One who is always other, yet speaks to us and dwelt among us in the flesh. We rely on images to conceptualize the Eternally Living One who dwells in unapproachable darkness – yet is the source of light! We think of H₂O, and how water manifests itself as water, snow and fog. We think of the single reality of the human mind, and how it functions as intellect, memory and will. We hear Jesus himself say he is the image of the Father, and the man or woman who sees him has seen the Father – and from them both proceeds the Spirit.

In our gospel passage, from John 3, seen on those ubiquitous homemade signs saying “John 3:16” at ball parks, is a vitally important “word of life”: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”

In the face of this *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, this Trinitarian Mystery that eludes grasp and compels attraction, maybe we could look at a few snapshots. Well, not really scrapbook snapshots but rather famous news photos. Strangely, we might discover some insight. When we reflect on the last week, on streets in Minneapolis and cities across the country, on Lafayette Park across from the White House, on parks and public places around the world, on our own homes, we see the power of image. We see signs that read, “No justice, no peace,” and we recall Pope Paul VI, who in 1972 declared, “If you want peace, work for justice.” How quickly the term “taking a knee” has morphed from a controversial gesture during the national anthem, to a deadly restraint on George Floyd, to a sign of solidarity between decent police officers and protesters!

The photos I'll mention are well known to most alumni, I think. Then again, I am a proud and grateful member of the Class of 1975, and this is our 45th reunion! Where did those years go! The other day, I fell for click bait, those detestable web-based tricks. Click, and you are trapped

by an avalanche of ads before you get to the shots you want – and usually are underwhelmed. Still, the one that lured me was worth it; famous historical shots from the last century. Well, what does this have to do with the Most Blessed Trinity, the most sublime Christian dogma? Well, if God reveals himself amid human life, in time and space, it's likely during the last two centuries, some photographer has shot it.



Take 1970, the year our 50th anniversary class took their degrees. These newest Golden Anselmians surely remember Kent State, the student protest that claimed the lives of four students no different from themselves. The famous image of Jeffrey Miller, face down, his life bleeding out, with a young woman on her knees next to him, a kind of Pieta. Spooked into firing, Ohio National Guardsmen killed four unarmed students, two boys and two girls, that day – thus triggering massive demonstrations, including actions here. For many historians, Kent State hastened the end of the Vietnam War. One could ask, where was God that day? On the grass and pavement, I think, with Jeff, Allison Krause, Sandy

Scheuer and Bill Schroeder – Bill Schroeder, a member of ROTC on campus, who, minutes earlier, had returned a tear gas canister he found to a Guard member so it wouldn't be thrown back at them. I should add that I trust that God was with those who fell in Vietnam. We believe in a God who is with the innocent, suffering and oppressed. Then, now and always.



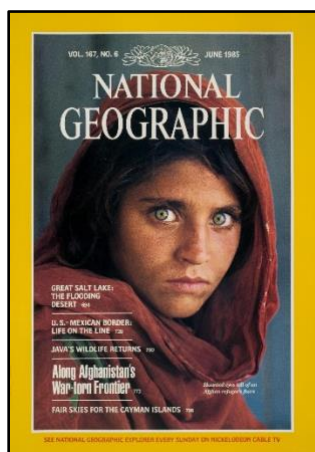
My classmates from 1975 might never forget the desperate efforts to rescue the last Americans and their Vietnamese allies from the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon. The war effort had collapsed. North Vietnamese tanks were barreling down the street ready to smash the gates of the embassy as the last choppers took off. Not everyone was rescued, but some were. The more the crowd cooperated, the more people made it onto the choppers – but in their desperation, many were lost. The salvation Jesus offers summons us to cooperation – and

more. It demands that we love one another – something most of us learned at home, but saw in real ways here too – in the way teachers sacrificed to open our minds, in the way cafeteria ladies always remembered us, in the way classmates went off to join the military and others joined peace demonstrations, both intent on serving the nation, in the way the monks remained faithful to a life of prayer and service. How strange, bittersweet and wonderful, then, for me as a Benedictine faculty member years later to have students from Hanoi in my journalism classes.



The year 1980 saw another famous photo from just down the road in Nashua. Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush were battling it out for a win in the NH Primary later in February. When other GOP candidates arrived to participate, surprising the moderator, and when Reagan began to explain why he had invited them, the future president had his mike cut. Standing up to address the hushed crowd in a booming voice, Reagan said, “I paid for this microphone” In a flash, the nation caught a glimpse of Reagan’s integrity and

strength – something revealed later in his tacit alliance with Pope John Paul II and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to face down and outspend communism in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union. A lot of Reagan’s decisions and policies still trouble me, but he knew that leadership requires responsibility, accountability and values. Even his harshest critics acknowledge that. The greatest gift of the Triune God is himself in the abiding presence of the Father, the redemptive work of the Son and the sanctifying dynamic of the Spirit. God’s very identity, if we attend to it, provides us incomparable instruction in leadership and enduring values. And to her immense credit, Saint Anselm knows how to instill them in us, and draw them out of us, year after year – even amid war, protest, recession and pandemic.



The Class of '85 is out 35 years, but they must remember the last photo. It had a lot of competition: Princess Diana dancing with John Travolta, sharks swimming around the newly found wreckage of the Titanic. In 1985, National Geographic published a cover shot of a young Afghan refugee in Pakistan during the Soviet invasion. With gentle, finely aristocratic features and piercing emerald eyes, Sharbat Gula was strikingly beautiful – and for much of her life, dispossessed, orphaned and poor. Now age 48, Sharbat is a widow, mother and grandmother. Called the “Afghan Mona Lisa,” she has been repatriated to Kabul, the Afghan capital and finally has a home and income. She needs no instruction about war, religious fundamentalism, gender politics, refugee life and family instability; she is a survivor. Our God has given us faith, deep and wide, that promises eternal life and

everlasting happiness, yet roots us in this world with the challenging task of abiding in faith, maintaining hope and sharing love, mercy and compassion. We seek a home, not in Kabul, Keene, Kansas City or anywhere on this earth, but one that is eternal with the God who loves us.

The coronavirus pandemic has altered life, but so many face this challenge with grace, conviction and determination: faculty, staff, monastic confreres, students, alumni and, in a special way, Anselmians on the front lines in nursing, medicine, research, emergency response, education and ministry. Others have fought to maintain shops, restaurants, transport and other key features of the economy. And what about parents! Suddenly, mom and dad were full-time teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, cheerleaders and disciplinarians – and still had to Zoom into their day job.

We owe all of them a debt of gratitude. They remind us that Saint Anselm's values and character, her faith and mission are not simply things in scrapbooks – but, rather, forces that form and impel her sons and daughters. In a strange way, we are photos and images too – and we can reveal something of the One, Only, Eternal Triune God ... Father, Son and Spirit ... who is, was and always will be, who acts in history, who made, sustains and loves us! We are meant to mirror Christ, and Christ is the image of the Father – and both send out the Spirit into our hearts. Life is our scrapbook. May we fill its pages with enduring images of love, compassion and mercy. So how does it feel to be an icon of the Living God? ◀

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Photo credits: The New York Times, Newsweek, AP, National Geographic