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THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

A translation for the 21st Century

Part III — Sermons

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THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

A translation for the 21st Century

SERMONS

III

(51-94)

on the New Testament

translation and notes

Edmund Hill, O.P.

editor

John E. Rotelle, O.S.A.

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SERMON 52

THE TRINITY

Date: 410-412¹*The Trinity in the baptism of Christ*

1. The reading of the gospel has set me a subject to talk to your graces² about, as though at the Lord's command. And indeed it is the Lord's command; I took it, you see, as a kind of order from him to preach a sermon, that I should understand he wanted me to speak about what he had wanted to be read. Please listen then with all your eagerness and devotion, and these, I hope, will help me in my difficult task by winning the goodwill of the Lord our God.

What we see, what we are looking at as kind of divine tableau being presented to us by the river Jordan, is our God being shown us in three persons.³ When Jesus came and was baptized by John, the Lord by the slave, he was giving us an example of humility, and he showed us that this humility was a fulfilling of justice, when John said to him, *I ought to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?* and he answered *Let it be so now, let all justice be fulfilled* (Mt 3:14-15)—so when he had been baptized, the skies opened and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the appearance of a dove; then there followed a voice from above, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I have taken delight* (Mt 3:16-17). So we have the three, somehow or other, clearly distinguished: in the voice the Father; in the man the Son, in the dove the Holy Spirit. There is no need to do more than just remind you of this; it's easy enough to see. It's clear, there's not the slightest shadow of doubt that this triad is being presented to us, when Christ the Lord, coming to John in the form of a servant,⁴ is of course the Son; you can't, after all, say he's the Father, or say he's the Holy Spirit. *Jesus came*, it says—obviously the Son of God. Can anyone have any doubts about the dove, or say, "What is the dove?" since the gospel itself testifies in the clearest terms, *The Holy Spirit came down upon him in the appearance of a dove?* Likewise, there can be no doubt that the voice is the Father's, when it says *You are my Son* (Mk 1:11). So we have the three clearly distinguished.

2. And if we take account of the places involved, I make bold to say (I say it timidly enough, but I still make bold to say it), we have the three apparently separable. Jesus comes to the river, from one place to another place; the dove comes down from the sky to the earth, from one place to another place; the Father's voice is heard neither from the earth nor the water, but from the sky. These three are apparently separated by place, separated by function, separated by action.

Now someone may say to me, "Demonstrate that the three are inseparable. Remember you're speaking as a Catholic, speaking to Catholics. Our faith, after all, that is to say the true⁵ faith, the right faith, the Catholic faith, which is not a bundle of opinions and prejudices but a summary of biblical testimonies, not riddled with heretical rashness, but founded on apostolic truth—our faith insists on this. This is what we know, this is what we believe; this, even if we don't see it with our eyes, nor even with our hearts as long as we are being purified by faith,⁶ this all the same we hold with the firmest and most orthodox faith, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one inseparable trinity or triad; one God, not three gods; but one God in such a way that the Son is not the Father, that the Father is not the Son, that the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. It is this ineffable godhead, wholly self-contained, renewing, creating, re-creating all things, sending, reclaiming, judging, liberating, this then that we know to be at once both ineffably a trinity, triad or three, and inseparable."

The help of the Lord in speaking about the Trinity

3. So what are we to do? Here you have the Son coming separately in the person of a man, the Holy Spirit separately coming down from the sky in the form of a dove, the voice of the Father separately being heard from the sky, *This is my Son*. Where now is the inseparable trinity? I see that through me God has made you very attentive. Pray for me, that while you are, so to say, opening your laps,⁷ he may grant the means of filling what you have opened. Join in the work with me. After all, you can see what I have undertaken (not only what, but also who), what I want to talk about, where I am placed, how I am placed in a *body that perishes and weighs down the soul, and the earthly dwelling oppresses the mind thinking many things* (Wis 9:15). So when I disentangle this mind from many things and concentrate it on the one God, the inseparable trio, in order to see something which I can say, I may say, don't you think, in order to express something worthwhile to you in this body that weighs down the soul, *For to you, Lord, I have lifted up my soul* (Ps 86:4)? May he help me, may he lift it up with me, because I am rather too weak for it, and it is rather too heavy for me.

The works of Father and Son are inseparable

4. The question that is commonly put by the more eager brethren, commonly discussed in the conversations of those who love God's word, about which there is commonly much knocking at God's door, is this: people say, "Does the Father do anything that the Son doesn't do, or the Son do anything that the Father doesn't do?" For the time being let us talk about the Father and the Son; when he to whom we say, *Be my helper, do not forsake me* (Ps 27:9), has brought our efforts to a successful conclusion, we will have to understand that the Holy Spirit too is in no way excluded from the activity of the Father and the Son.

So then, brothers, here's something about the Father and the Son. Does the Father do anything without the Son? We answer, "No." You're not quite sure about it? Well, what can he do without him through whom all things were made? *All things*, it says, *were made through him*; and to drum it into the heads of the slow, the obstinate, the argumentative, he added, *and without him was made nothing* (Jn 1:3).

The Father does nothing without the Son

5. So what then, brothers? *All things were made through him*. The whole of creation made through the Son—we naturally understand that the Father made it through his Word, God made it through his power and his wisdom. Are we going to say, "All things, to be sure, when they were created, were made through him, but the Father doesn't now govern all things through him"? Certainly not. Perish such a thought from the hearts of the faithful, away with it from the ideas of the devout, from the understanding of the pious. It's simply impossible that he should have created through him and not govern through him, unthinkable that what exists should not be controlled through him, when through him it was made to exist.

This too we can let ourselves be taught by the evidence of scripture. As well as telling us that all things were made and created through him, as we have just recalled from the gospel, *All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing*, it also says that what was made is controlled and managed through him. You recognize Christ, I suppose, as the power of God and the wisdom of God;⁸ acknowledge what is also said about Wisdom: *She reaches from end to end mightily, and manages all things sweetly* (Wis 8:1). So let us have no doubts that all things are governed through him, through whom all things were made. Thus the Father does nothing without the Son, the Son nothing without the Father.

Was the Father born? Did the Father suffer?

6. Now the problem crops up, which we have undertaken to solve in the Lord's name and according to his will. If the Father does nothing without the Son and the Son nothing without the Father, won't it follow, presumably, that

we have to say the Father too was born of the Virgin Mary, the Father suffered under Pontius Pilate, the Father rose again and ascended into heaven? Not at all. We don't say this, because we don't believe this. *I believed, you see, therefore have I spoken; and we too believe, therefore we also speak* (2 Cor 4:13).⁹ What's in the creed? That the Son was born of the virgin, not the Father. What's in the creed? That the Son suffered under Pontius Pilate and died, not the Father.

It's escaped our memory, has it, that there are some people who have got it all wrong, called Patripassians,¹⁰ who say that it was the Father himself who was born of a woman, the Father himself who suffered, the Father himself, in fact, who is the Son—they are two names, merely, not two things? And the Catholic Church removed these people from the communion of saints,¹¹ to stop them leading anyone astray, and let them go on quarreling, if they must, outside separately by themselves.

The kernel of the difficulty

7. So let me call your thoughts back to the difficulty of the question. Someone may say to me, "You have said that the Father does nothing without the Son, nor the Son without the Father; and you have produced evidence from the scriptures that the Father does nothing without the Son, because all things were made through him; and that what has been made is not governed without the Son, because he is the wisdom of the Father, reaching from end to end mightily, and managing all things sweetly. Now you tell me, apparently speaking against yourself, that the Son, not the Father, was born of the virgin; the Son, not the Father, suffered; the Son rose again, not the Father. So either admit that the Son does something without the Father, or else admit that the Father too was born, suffered, died, rose again. Say one thing or the other; choose one of the two." I, for my part, won't choose either. I won't say either one thing or the other; I won't say that the Son does anything without the Father, because if I do I shall be lying; and I won't say either that the Father was born, suffered, rose again, because if I do I shall be lying just as much. "How then," he says, "will you get yourself out of this corner?"

The birth of the Son of Mary was the work of both Father and Son

8. So you like the way the problem is set, do you? May God ensure that you also like the way it's solved. Here then is what I say, so that the Lord may rescue both me and you from this corner. After all, we stand together in one and the same faith in the name of Christ, and we live in one and the same house under one and the same Lord, and under one and the same head we are members together in one and the same body, and we are quickened or animated by one and the same Spirit. So in order that the Lord may set us free from the dilemma of this very troublesome question, both me the speaker and you the audience, this is what I say: the Son indeed, and not the Father, was born of the Virgin Mary; but this birth of the Son, not the Father, from the Virgin Mary was the

work of both Father and Son. It was not indeed the Father, but the Son who suffered; yet the suffering of the Son was the work of both Father and Son. It wasn't the Father who rose again, but the Son; yet the resurrection of the Son was the work of both Father and Son.

Now we seem to have rid ourselves of this problem, but perhaps only through my formulation; let's see if it's also through the divine formulation of the matter. It is up to me then to demonstrate by the evidence of the holy books that the birth of the Son was the work of both Father and Son, likewise his passion and resurrection; so that while it is indeed the birth and passion and resurrection of the Son alone, nonetheless these three things, while belonging to the Son alone, were not brought about by the Father alone or by the Son alone, but by the Father to be sure, and by the Son. Let us prove each point. You are listening as judges;¹² the case has been stated, let the witnesses step forward. Let's suppose you, the justices, say to me what is usually said to pleaders, "Bring the proofs of your proposition." I certainly will, and I will also read out to you the text of the heavenly law. You have listened carefully to my statement of the case; listen even more carefully now to my proof of it.

According to Paul the birth of the Son was the work of the Father

9. The first thing I have to bring proof of concerns the birth of Christ, how the Father effected it and the Son effected it, although what Father and Son effected together belongs only to the Son. I refer you first to Paul as a suitable counsel learned in divine law. Plaintiffs today, you see, also have a Paul who declares the laws for litigants, not for Christians.¹³ I refer you, I repeat, to the Paul who declares the laws of peace, not of litigation. Let the holy apostle show us how the Father brought about the birth of the Son. *But when the fullness of time, he says, had come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law* (Gal 4:4-5).¹⁴ You have heard it, and because it is clear and straightforward, you have understood it. There you have the Father causing the Son to be born of the virgin. For *when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son*, that is, the Father sent Christ. How did he send him? *Made of a woman, made under the law*. So the Father made him of a woman under the law.

Christ was born of a woman, a virgin

10. Or perhaps you are bothered because I said "of the virgin" and Paul says "of a woman." Don't let it bother you; don't let's linger on it; I'm not, after all, speaking to illiterate people.¹⁵ You get each thing said in scripture, both "of a virgin" and "of a woman." Of a virgin, how and where? *Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son* (Is 7:14). Of a woman, as you have just heard. They don't contradict each other. It's an idiom of the Hebrew language to mean by "women" not those who have lost their virginity, but just females. You have the evidence of a text in Genesis, when Eve was first fashioned: *He fashioned her*

into a woman (Gn 2:22). It also says somewhere else in scripture that God ordered the women to be set apart who had not known the bed of a man.¹⁶ So that's something we all ought to know. We mustn't let it hold us up, so that we can have time to explain, with the Lord's help, other things that are more likely to do so.

The birth of the Son also made by the Son

11. So we have proved that the birth of the Son was brought about by the Father; now let us also prove it was brought about by the Son. What is the birth of the Son from the Virgin Mary? It is certainly the taking of the form of a slave.¹⁷ Now hear that the Son too brought this about: *Who, when he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal to God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave* (Phil 2:6-7). *When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son made of a woman* (Gal 4:4), *who was made for him of the seed of David according to the flesh* (Rom 1:3). So we see the birth of the Son made by the Father. But because the Son *emptied himself, taking the form of a slave*, we see the birth of the Son also made by the Son. This has been proved. Let's pass on to the next point. Please concentrate on grasping it as it follows in due order.

The Son's passion was brought about by the Father and by the Son

12. Let's prove that the Son's passion was also brought about by the Father, and brought about by the Son. Let the Father bring about the Son's passion: *Who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all* (Rom 8:32). Let the Son too bring about his own passion: *Who loved me and gave himself up for me* (Gal 2:20). The Father gave up the Son, the Son gave up himself. This passion happened to one of them, but was brought about by both. Just like his birth, so too the passion of Christ was not the work of the Father without the Son, nor of the Son without the Father. The Father handed over the Son, the Son handed over himself. What had Judas got to do with it, apart from the sin?¹⁸ Let's pass on again to the next point; let's come to the resurrection.

The resurrection of the Son brought about by both Father and Son

13. Let's see the Son indeed, and not the Father, rising again, but the resurrection of the Son brought about by both Father and Son. Let the Father achieve the Son's resurrection: *Therefore he exalted him from the dead,¹⁹ and bestowed on him the name which is above every name* (Phil 2:9). So the Father raised up the Son by exalting him and waking him from the dead. Doesn't the Son also raise himself up? Of course he does. He said of the temple, as representing his body, *Pull down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up* (Jn 2:19). Finally, just as it belongs to his passion to lay down his life, so it belongs to his resurrection to take it up again; so let's see if the Son indeed laid down his life and the Father, not he himself, gave him back his life. That the Father did give

it back to him is obvious; that's what the psalm is talking about when it says, *And raise me up and I will repay them* (Ps 41:10). But that the Son also gave himself back his own life—well, what are you expecting from me? Let him tell you himself. *I have power to lay down my life*—I haven't yet said what I promised, I just said *lay down*, but you have already cried out, because you are flying on ahead. You are well taught in the school of the heavenly master; like people who listen carefully to the readings and devoutly repeat them, you are not unaware of what follows. *I have power*, he says, *to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again. Nobody takes it from me, but I myself lay it down of my own accord, and I take it up again* (Jn 10:18).

Summary

14. I've carried out my promise; I have proved my propositions, I think, with the strongest documentary evidence. Hold on to what you have heard. I shall repeat it briefly, and so commend to your minds' safe keeping something that is in my humble opinion exceedingly useful. The Father wasn't born of the virgin, and yet this birth of the Son from the virgin was the work of both Father and Son. The Father did not suffer on the cross, and yet the passion of the Son was the work of both Father and Son. The Father did not rise again from the dead, and yet the resurrection of the Son was the work of both Father and Son. You have the persons quite distinct, and their working inseparable. So let us never say that the Father worked anything without the Son, the Son anything without the Father. Or perhaps you are worried about the miracles Jesus did, in case perhaps he did some which the Father didn't do? Then what about *But the Father abiding in me does his works* (Jn 14:10)? What I have said is plain enough, it only needed to be said. We don't have to work at understanding it, only to take care to remind ourselves of it.

The godhead is quite beyond material localization

15. There's still something else I want to say, for which I really do require both your keenest attention and your intercession with God. Well then, it's only bodies that are contained by and occupy local space. The godhead is quite beyond material localization. No one should go looking for it, so to say, in space. It is present everywhere, invisible and inseparable; not more in one part, less in another, but everywhere whole, nowhere divided. Who can see this, who can grasp it? Let us be modest in our aims; let us remember who we are that are talking and what we are talking about. This and that, whatever it is that God is, must be believed with piety, reflected on in a holy manner, and as far as possible, as much as is granted us, it must be understood in a way beyond telling. Let words be stilled, the tongue cease from wagging; let the heart be stirred, the heart be lifted up to the mystery. That, you see, is not something that can rise up into the heart of man,²⁰ but something to which the heart of man should rise up. Let us take a look at creation: *For his invisible things are to be observed,*

being understood from the creation of the world through the things that have been made (Rom 1:20); just in case, in the things God has made, which we are used to and on familiar terms with, we may perhaps find some likeness, through which to show how there can be three somethings, three that can be separately presented but that operate inseparably.

The creator is so far above us

16. Hey, brothers, I want your whole minds, your total concentration. First see what it is I am proposing; perhaps I may find it in the created sphere, because the creator himself is so far above us. And perhaps someone here, across whose mind the brilliance of the truth has flashed like lightning, perhaps someone here is in a position to say those words, *As for me, I said in my ecstasy*—what did you say in your ecstasy? *I am cast out from the sight of your eyes* (Ps 31:22). Well, the person who said this seems to me to have lifted his soul up to God, to have poured out his soul above himself while it was said to him every day, *Where is your God?* (Ps 42:4.3) and to have come into a kind of spiritual contact with that unchanging light; then, so it seems to me, being too weak in the sense of sight to be able to bear that brilliance, he fell back into his own sick and sorry condition, and began comparing himself with that light, and realized that he still could not adjust the lens of his mind to the light of God's wisdom. And because he had done this in an ecstasy, being snatched away from bodily consciousness and snatched up to God, he said on being fetched back somehow from God to the human level, "As for me, I said in my ecstasy—for I saw something indescribable in ecstasy, which I couldn't endure for long; and on being returned to this mortal coil and the many thoughts of mortals arising from the body which weighs down the soul,²¹ I said—what? I am cast out from the sight of your eyes. You are far, far above, I am far, far below."

So what are we to say, brothers, about God? For if you have fully grasped what you want to say, it isn't God. If you have been able to comprehend it, you have comprehended something else instead of God. If you think you have been able to comprehend, your thoughts have deceived you. So he isn't this, if this is what you have understood; but if he is this, then you haven't understood it. So what is it you want to say, seeing you haven't been able to understand it?²²

Search for the likeness of God in yourself

17. Let's see, then, if we can't find something in creation, by which to show that there are three somethings which can both be separately presented and also operate inseparably. What shall we turn to? The sky, to discuss the sun and the moon and the stars? Or the earth, to investigate, perhaps, shrubs and trees and animals that fill the earth? Or shall we investigate the sky itself, or the earth itself, which contains everything to be found in heaven and on earth?

How long, O man, are you going to go round and round creation? Come back to yourself, look at yourself, inspect yourself, discuss yourself. You are looking

in creation for three somethings which can be pointed out separately and which work inseparably. If you are looking for them in creation, first look in yourself. After all you can't say you are not a creature. You are looking for a likeness. Are you going to look for it in animals? You were talking about God, remember, when you were looking for some kind of likeness, you were talking about the three persons of that inexpressible majesty; and because you failed at the divine level, you confessed your weakness with a becoming humility, and came down to the human level. Investigate the problem there. Are you going to search among animals? Are you going to search in the sun, in a star? Which of these, I ask you, was made after the image and likeness of God? You can look for something altogether more familiar and better than these in yourself. It's man, you see, that God made after his image and likeness.²³ Search in yourself—perhaps the image of the Trinity may hold some trace of the Trinity.²⁴ And what kind of image? A manufactured one and very remote, though even a very remote image is a likeness. But not in the way the Son is the image and exactly the same as the Father.²⁵ Your image in your son, after all, is rather different from your image in the mirror. Very different, in fact. In your son, your image is yourself, since your son is the same as you are in nature; in substance he's the same as you, in person he is other than you. So then man is not the image in the same way as the only-begotten Son is, but he is made after a certain image and after a certain likeness. Let him search in himself for something, if he can possibly find it, indeed for three somethings that are separately stated and that work inseparably. I will search, you search with me; not I in you and you in me, but you in you and I in me. Let us search in common, and in common study our common nature and substance.

One soul, image of God

18. Observe, man, and see if what I say is true. Have you got a body, have you got flesh? "I have," you say. "How else is it, after all, that I am in a place, that I move from place to place? How else do I hear the words you speak, but with ears of flesh? How else do I see the mouth you speak with, but eyes of flesh?" So you've got it, we are all agreed; and we needn't linger longer on such an obvious matter.

Now observe something else; observe what is acting through the flesh. You hear with your ear, but hearing doesn't come from your ear; there's another inside who hears through the ear. You see through your eyes; well just look at them. Have you acknowledged the house and ignored the householder? Do the eyes see by themselves? Isn't there another who sees with them? I'm not just saying the eyes of a dead person don't see, where it's agreed that the householder has departed from the body; but it's a fact that the eyes of someone who's thinking deeply about another matter don't see the face of someone who's present.

So turn your eyes to the person within. That is where some kind of likeness is rather to be looked for of three somethings that can be indicated separately

but operate inseparably. What has your mind got in it?²⁶ No doubt, if I look thoroughly, I will find many things. But there is something ready to hand which can be more easily understood. What has your soul got inside? I will remind you, you must recollect. I am not requiring you just to believe what I am about to say; don't accept anything I say unless you find it in yourself. So take a look at yourself.

But first—this is something I had overlooked—let us see whether man is the image, not of the Son alone or the Father alone, but of the Father and the Son together, and also of course in consequence of the Holy Spirit too. Genesis is speaking: *Let us make man*, it says, *after our image and likeness* (Gn 1:26). So the Father isn't making without the Son, nor the Son without the Father. *Let us make man after our image and likeness*. "Let us make," not "let me make," or "make," or "let him make," but "let us make." "After our image," not yours or mine, but ours.

The likeness of the Trinity in man

19. So, I begin the interrogation—and I am talking of something that is in fact *unlike* God. No one has any business to say, "Look what he's comparing God to." I have already said it, and said it again, and I've warned you, and I've warned myself: these things are very, very remote—the lowest from the highest, changeable from unchanging, created things from those that create, human things from divine. Take note, I begin by insisting that what I am going to say is very, very remote from God. Nobody has any right to slander me. So in case someone is sharpening his teeth, while all I'm asking for is ears, this is what I have promised to show you: some three things indicated separately, operating inseparably. How like or unlike these things are to the omnipotent Trinity I am not now considering but at this lowest and changeable created level we can find three somethings which can be indicated separately and which operate inseparably.

Oh, how pedestrian can your imagination be, how obstinate and unbelieving can you get in your prejudices! Why do you hesitate to allow in that inexpressible majesty of the godhead what you have been able to discover in yourself?²⁷ This is what I am saying, this is my question: Man, have you got memory? If you haven't, how have you retained what I have been saying? But perhaps you have already forgotten what I said just now. All right then, take just this that I say: "I said," two syllables which you could only retain through memory. After all, how could you know there are two of them if you had forgotten the first while the second was being uttered? So why waste any more time? Why am I being chivvied and harried in this way to convince you of the obvious?²⁸ It's as plain as a pikestaff, you have got memory.

Another question: have you got understanding? "I have," you say. If you didn't have memory, you wouldn't retain what I have said; if you didn't have understanding, you wouldn't be able to assess what you have retained. So you have got this too. You apply your understanding to what you retain inside you,

and you see it, and by seeing it you are formed by it, so that you can be said to know it.²⁹

Third question: You've got memory, by which you retain what is said; you've got understanding, by which you understand what is retained; about these two I ask you a further question: Have you been willing to retain and understand? "I've certainly been willing," you say. So then, you have got will. These are the three things which I promised I would declare in your hearing and to your minds; these three which are in you, which you can count distinctly, and which you cannot separate. So these three, memory, understanding and will; notice, I say, that these three are uttered separately, but operate inseparably.

Memory, understanding, and will

20. The Lord will be on hand to help; indeed I see he is on hand, from your understanding I understand that he is standing by. I infer from your voices, you see, how well you have understood; and I presume that he is the one who helps you to understand everything. I promised to show you three things indicated separately, operating inseparably. There you are; I had no idea what you had in mind; you showed me by saying "Memory." This word, this sound, this utterance proceeded to my ears from your mind. You were silently thinking about this thing that is memory, you weren't saying anything. It was in you, it hadn't yet come to me. Then in order to present me with what was in you, you spoke that word, "memory." I heard it, I heard the three syllables of the noun "memory."³⁰ It's a noun of three syllables, an utterance; it was pronounced, it reached my ear, it suggested something to my mind. What was pronounced has faded away, what was suggested, and what suggested it remains.³¹

But the point I am now inquiring about is this: when you spoke the word "memory," you can see, clearly, that this word is proper only to memory. The other two things have their own names, one being called understanding, not memory, the other being called will, not memory; it's only the third one that is called memory. But in order to say this, in order to operate or make these three syllables, what were you operating with? This word, which belongs to memory alone, was the work in you both of memory, for you to retain what you were saying, and of understanding, for you to know what you were retaining, and of will, for you to utter what you were knowing.

Thanks be to the Lord our God! He has helped us, both in me and in you. Really and truly, I'm telling your graces, I undertook to discuss this matter and put it across with the greatest trepidation; I was afraid, you see, that I might delight the wit of the clever, and bore the less clever to tears. But now I can see that you have not only grasped what I have said, listening so attentively and understanding so readily, but you have also flown ahead of what I was going to say. The Lord be thanked.

Memory, understanding, and will and the mystery of the Trinity

21. So now you can see that I have no worries about making a suggestion that you have already understood. I am not drumming something unknown into you, but repeating a suggestion you have already grasped. Here it is then: of those three things one was named, the name of only one of them was mentioned; "memory" is the name of just one of those three. And yet all three were in operation to produce the name of one of the three. The single word "memory" couldn't be pronounced without will, understanding and memory all operating. The single word "understanding" can't be pronounced without memory, will and understanding all operating. Nor can the single word "will" be pronounced without memory and understanding and will all operating.

So I think I have explained what I proposed. What I have separately pronounced, I have inseparably operated. All three produced just one of these names; and yet this one name which all three have produced doesn't belong to all three but only to one of them. All three produced the name "memory," but the only one of them it belongs to is the memory. All three produced the name "understanding," but the only one of them it belongs to is the understanding. All three produced the name "will," but the only one of them it belongs to is the will.

So too, the Trinity produced the flesh of Christ, but the only one of them it belongs to is Christ. The Trinity produced the dove from the sky, but the only one of them it belongs to is the Holy Spirit. The Trinity produced the voice from heaven, but the only one of them the voice belongs to is the Father.

Memory, understanding, and will in relation to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

22. So let none of you say to me, none of you try to bully or trick poor feeble me with the question, "So which of these three, which you have pointed out to us in our minds or souls, which of these three belongs to the Father, that is to some sort of likeness of the Father, which of them to some sort of likeness of the Son, which to some sort of likeness of the Holy Spirit?" I can't tell you, I can't explain. Let's leave something as well to people's reflections, let's generously allow something else to silence. Return to yourself, withdraw from all the din. Look inside yourself and see if you have there any pleasant private nook in your consciousness where you don't make a row, where you don't go to law, where you don't prepare your case, where you don't brood on pigheaded quarrels. Be gentle in hearing the word, in order to understand. Perhaps you will be able to say, *You will give exultation and joy to my hearing, and bones will rejoice, but ones that have been humbled* (Ps 51:8), not "made proud."

Three but one

23. It's enough then that we have been able to show three things which are indicated separately but operate inseparably. If you have found this in yourself,

if you have found it in man, in any person walking the face of the earth, still carrying around a fragile body which weighs down the soul;³² then believe that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit can both be separately indicated by certain visible signs and certain created appearances taken over for the occasion, and also that they operate inseparably. That's enough for now.

I don't say memory is the Father, understanding is the Son, will is the Spirit. I don't say it, however it may be understood, I don't dare to. Let's reserve these greater matters for those who can grasp them; for the weak, as one of them, I have done what I can. I haven't introduced these three things as though they were to be equated to that divine triad, as though they were to be marshaled into an analogy, that is to say into a strict comparison. I don't mean that.

What do I mean, then? Look, I've found three things in you, indicated separately, operating inseparably; and each one of those three has a name produced by the three; but it doesn't belong to the three, only to one of them. So now believe the same about that three which you cannot see, if you have heard and seen and grasped it about this three. What's in you, after all, you can know. When will you ever be able to know what is in the one who made you, whatever that may be? Even if you will be able to, you certainly can't now. And yet, when you are able to, do you think you will be able to know God in the same way as God knows himself? So let that be enough for your graces. I have said what I could; I have kept the promise you were exacting from me. Whatever more needs to be added, well you must ask the Lord to perfect and complete your understanding.

NOTES

1. The sermon is actually on one of the implications for trinitarian doctrine of the story of the baptism of Jesus, Mt 3:16-17. The problem is that in that scene each of the divine persons is manifested separately by a separate sign, the Son by the man Jesus himself, the Holy Spirit by the form of a dove, and the Father by the voice from heaven; and yet it is a cardinal point of trinitarian doctrine that the three divine persons work inseparably *ad extra*, that is to say in the created sphere we cannot say that the Father does some things, the Son other things, and the Holy Spirit different things again.

The point is discussed, very briefly, in *The Trinity* IV, 21, 30, and raised, but hardly discussed at the beginning of that work, I, 5, 8. Though in this last passage Augustine says that people weary him with questions on this particular point, it is not in fact one that he devotes much attention to in his magisterial work on the Trinity. He deals with this again in Letter 169, 2, 6, written to his friend and colleague Evodius (but it is a slightly huffy letter!) toward the end of the year 415. Both here and in *The Trinity* IV he uses the same illustration of memory, understanding and will to make his point.

Does this connection with other Augustinian texts help us to date this sermon? Before answering, we must note that in one instance what Augustine says here does not accord with a major theme of his *The Trinity*. In the closing section of the sermon he says unequivocally, "I don't say memory is the Father, understanding is the Son, will is the Spirit. I don't say it . . . I don't dare to." He is clearly

thinking it, but he is very hesitant about it. Now in the last books of *The Trinity*, books IX, X and XI especially, he very definitely and definitively does say just that; he uses the mental triad as a very clear model or analogy for the divine triad—of course with all the necessary reservations that he touches on here, and states more precisely in his letter to Evodius.

Now while in *The Trinity* he is using the mental triad, and in particular the relationships between these three mental acts to cast light on the processions of the divine persons, and not to solve the problem of combining their distinctness with the inseparability of their actions as here, could he have said what he says here at the conclusion of his sermon after writing those books of *The Trinity*? I find it hard to believe that he could.

The Trinity was a work that took him a long time to write and was often interrupted, as indeed he says in Letter 169. That letter, as we have seen, was written in 415 (this is the date given by the Maurists). Now in Letter 174 to Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, Augustine says he is sending his colleague the complete work, but complains that because he had been so slow about it, some impatient friends had got hold of an incomplete text and published it (that is to say, had it copied) without his permission. This incomplete text went up to the first two thirds or so of book XII—so it contained the books in which he develops the analogy of memory, understanding, and will representing Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This pirating of his incomplete text had clearly not taken place when he wrote to Evodius in 415. But the letter to Aurelius, according to the Maurists, was written in 416. I am inclined to think that is too early a date, because in the letter Augustine says he gave up work on the project when he discovered what had happened, and only completed it (writing books XIII, XIV and XV) at the express request of Aurelius—and all that would have covered a much longer period than a year.

Nonetheless, I think we may tentatively infer that when he wrote to Evodius, he had already got two thirds of the way through book XII of *The Trinity*, and stopped there under the pressure of other demands on him. If that is so, this sermon would have been preached quite a long time before 415. The majority of the scholars in fact date it to 410-412, while one puts it as late as 419-420. For the reasons given, I cast my vote with the majority.

The scholars make no suggestions about the place. But in note 15 below I give reasons for thinking that it was probably preached at home in Hippo.

2. *Caritatem vestram*. This is now my definitive translation of this honorific address.

3. *In trinitate*. The word *trinitas* simply means threeness or a threesome. Of course it also means "the Trinity." But "the Trinity" in English is a special religious word, another word for God in a special context. And that is not how Augustine is using it, for the most part, in this sermon. He uses it to refer to the element of threeness in the divine mystery. So I will rarely translate it by "Trinity." The Latin text gives it here, I think incorrectly, a capital T.

4. See Phil 2:7.

5. Reading *vera* with the text (Maurists) instead of *vestra*, "your faith," with RB.

6. See Acts 15:9.

7. The text does not read altogether grammatically here: *et quasi aperientes sinum, donet ipse unde quod aperuistis impleatur*. The first phrase is hanging in the air. Six manuscripts have a variant, changing *aperientes* into the imperative *aperite*, parallel to *Orate*, "pray"; then *donet* etc. would be a separate sentence. I suggest emending *et* to *ut*, which would then govern *donet*. It still leaves *aperientes sinum* a little ungrammatical (it should be an ablative absolute), but rather more satisfactorily contained in the sentence. The meaning is the same. You open your lap by spreading your knees (you are wearing a tunic, and possibly a long gown, not trousers) so as to catch more in the skirts of your garment.

8. See 1 Cor 1:24.

9. See Ps 116:10.

10. Meaning "Father-suffered-ites." They are more commonly known as Sabellians, from Sabellius their alleged originator of whom nothing is really known; or as Modalists, because they treat the three as no more than three modes or masks of the one, single divine being. They came to the fore about 200 AD, and were vigorously opposed by Tertullian in his treatise *Adversus Praxeam*. In the following century some of the opponents of Arius and allies of the great Athanasius were accused of being such, and condemned for it.

11. That is, the communion of the Catholic faithful. He is clearly echoing the Apostles' Creed; it seems certain that by "saints" here he is not thinking primarily of the saints in heaven, but of "the holy people of God," which is the primary sense of the expression in the creed.

12. See Sermon 23:1, notes 5 and 7.

13. Augustine may have been referring to an eminent Roman jurist of the third century, Julius Paulus. This is the most likely way of taking the passage. On the other hand, he may have been alluding to the litigants who more and more in his day brought their cases to the bishop for adjudication thus imposing a burden on him, and his colleagues, that he personally found extremely irksome, but wasn't able to refuse. I suppose such litigants in the bishop's court may have quoted Paul the apostle in support of their cases, especially, perhaps, marriage cases. See, for example, 1 Cor 6:1-6, also 7:1-16.

14. The word "made" sounds rather odd; it represents the rather crabbed Latin translation of the Greek, which RSV translates "born."

15. This gives us some idea of the occasion on which the sermon was preached. It was clearly not at a Sunday Mass for the whole community, where many of the congregation, perhaps most, would be illiterate. So it would probably have been at some weekday service, or service for some special group of the devout—some kind of house Mass perhaps? Now would Augustine hold such a service outside his own local Church? At Carthage he certainly might have done so, by invitation. But there is no suggestion of an invitation here. So I read this passage as implying that the sermon was probably preached in Hippo.

16. See Nm 31:17-18; Jgs 21:11. In fact these texts go against him; he introduces the negative. But the Vulgate texts distinguish between *mulieres* who had known the bed of a man, and *feminae puellae* or *virgines* who had not. Perhaps in Nm 31:18 his text had *mulieres* where the Vulgate has *feminae*.

17. The Maurists add "in the virgin's womb."

18. In Latin (and Greek) it is the same word which I have successively translated "give up" and "hand over," that is also used for Judas betraying Jesus—*trado*. That is why Judas is brought in here. From this same word, we should observe, comes the idea of tradition—handing on from one generation to another.

19. "From the dead" omitted by the Maurists.

20. See 1 Cor 2:9, literally translated.

21. See Wis 14:15.

22. Before coming to his proposal—to try and understand something of the Trinity in a created likeness—he puts in this very important *caveat* against supposing we can understand anything at all about God directly and univocally. He was quite as committed to a negative or "apophatic" theology which says what God is not instead of what he is—as any of the Greek Fathers. Compare also what Thomas Aquinas says in his *Summa Theologiae* 1a, q. 3, prologue.

23. See Gn 1:26.

24. This is a different use of the words "image" and "trace" (*imago* and *vestigium*) from the one we find in *The Trinity*. Here his use of the terms is *loose* and *ad hoc*; but the trace seems to be an extra quality of the image, ensuring its genuine likeness. In *The Trinity* on the other hand traces or *vestigia* are to be found throughout the material creation, and their likeness to the original or exemplar is far more remote than that of the image, which is only to be found in the human (and angelic) mind. Perhaps this is just one more indication that this sermon was preached well before the relevant books of *The Trinity* (IX to XI) were composed.

25. Here I follow the Maurists, as reproduced by Migne, in treating "Son" and "Father" as referring to the divine persons, by giving them capitals. The text of the Italian edition gives them lower case first letters, treating this sentence as a general remark about sons and fathers such as he goes on to make. If you prefer that, you will translate "a son" and "a father" instead of "the Son" and "the Father." I do not think it makes such good sense.

26. Saint Augustine locates the divine image in man in the mind, not as the later, decadent, catechetical tradition has it, in the soul. True, he doesn't always use these words strictly; but generally for him the soul is the animating principle which is active in the bodily senses and appetites, and so Augustine is quite ready to talk about the souls of animals or plants. The mind on the other hand

(*mens* or *animus*, as distinct from *anima*, soul), is the essentially non-bodily or spiritual element in man.

27. That is, three things that operate inseparably, while they are separately indicated, and thus really distinct.

28. He is acting this out, of course, in the pulpit, pretending to be pestered by silly questions.

29. In his view (the commonplace of ancient philosophy, shared by all schools) the intellect is formed by its object, the thing known, just as the senses are by their objects; i.e. it receives an impression from its object as wax receives an impression from a seal or signet ring; it is "shaped" by its object.

30. In Latin, the four syllables of *memoria*.

31. What was suggested: the meaning or idea in my mind; what suggested it: the meaning or idea in yours.

32. See Wis 9:5.