

Cemetery visits and picnics have little in common. When we visit a cemetery we stare into the face of death, remembering those who lost their lives, some out of love for their country. Picnics celebrate family, friends, food, and the great outdoors. Picnics celebrate life. But every year on memorial day weekend people combine both extremes -- the contemplation of death and the celebration of life. This weekend, which stands at the threshold of school and summer, holds these contradictions.

As it happens our church calendar celebrates Trinity Sunday this year on memorial day weekend. It was on Trinity Sunday that we dedicated our church two years ago. It was on Trinity Sunday in 1631 that John Francis Regis celebrated his first mass as a priest, an event the church remembered when they assigned his feastday to the month of June. Trinity Sunday celebrates the mystery of God's own internal contradiction. We profess belief in one God, manifest, however, in three distinct persons. The contradiction becomes stronger when we think not just about the persons of God but the personalities of God. God appears in the scriptures as creator, destroyer, warrior, and friend.

To read only the scriptures of this Sunday, we'd get a very loving interpretation of God. Moses hears God call himself, "The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Paul refers to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. John says God sent the son not to condemn the world but to save it. All the images show a God of immense compassion with a desire to help and save.

Yet experience shows that God's personality is more complex than that. God created and tolerates a world where hatred and love co-exist. People become angriest with the ones they love the most. At Littleton Colorado the killers asked two girls, "Do you believe in God?" When they said yes they were shot point blank. Some kids wear t-shirts that say John 3:16, in honor of the beautiful passage which opens today's gospel, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." Other kids wear t-shirts that say Austin 3:16, in honor of a professional wrestler who mocks the love of God revealed in that passage with the glorification of violence against an opponent. Contradictions abound in God, in the world, and in each one of us.

Paul's advice in today's second reading is for the Christian community to pull its act together. "Put things in order," he says, "agree with one another, live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you." If we practice charity we can gain peace. As this weekend will embrace both death and life in a spirit of hope and celebration, let us embrace all, those who love and those who hate, and rededicate ourselves to order and peace.