

The art museum in St. Louis held a special exhibit some years ago of works by Claude Monet. Monet was one of the French impressionists of the last century and to this day people marvel at how up close his works seem nothing but colorful dots and scratches, but at a distance they reveal some of the most beautiful scenes on canvas. What I remember most from that exhibit was a wall on which was hung several paintings of haystacks. Monet had chosen one subject and painted it over and over again at different times of the day and from different angles. My first reaction was, "This is really stupid. Why would anyone create so many paintings of such a simple subject that look so much alike?" But as I looked at them together I came to know that place of the haystacks far better than I could have from seeing only one or two of these paintings. I knew what the place looked like at morning and at dusk, I knew its hues and its vistas, even though I had not moved nor had I spent more than a few minutes in that place.

I think of Monet's haystacks on Trinity Sunday because in everyone's life God reveals himself from different angles and at different times. Even though none of us has spent an eternity with God and none of us has seen him face to face, still each of us has spent time with him, each of us has met God in our prayer, from different angles and on different occasions. Gradually we come to understand better who God is.

Week after week we recite a creed to profess our faith in the Trinity, and week after week our minds wander from one amorphous image to another, dimly distinguishing God from God, light from light, and true God from true God. As a child, I attended a Catholic grade school. Whenever we came to the religion class about the Holy Trinity, the teacher would say, "Well, it's a mystery." And off we'd march to the next lesson. They've drawn circles, they've drawn triangles. They've drawn disembodied eyeballs and birds that blaze like the sun. They made us think that geometry would help us understand the Trinity, but most of us never understood geometry. The simple point is that God is present to us in different ways, and what we don't understand now we will understand more perfectly later.

The Scripture readings for today's Mass help underscore this simple point. They turn aside from philosophically musing about the essence of God and tell us in straightforward images who God is. For example, we meet Moses on Mount Sinai after he shattered the ten commandments at the feet of the golden calf. With those tablets broke the sublime dream Moses had that his people would be faithful to God. He climbed back up Mount Sinai, ashamed of his people, ashamed of himself. Who is God? God is the one who embraced Moses in a cloud on Mt. Sinai, who told him, "I am the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity." St. Paul encouraged his community to live in harmony and peace. Who is God? The God of peace with stays with those who love. But Jesus, of course, said it best. Who is God? God is our lover. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life." There is no mystery really, there is only understanding of who God is. God is love.