

Fifth Sunday of Easter 2023 A

The story is told of a kindergarten teacher about this time of year, near the end of school when the weather gets nice and children's energy is high. Looking for some activity to keep her class occupied, she handed out paper and markers and told them to draw a picture of something no one had ever seen before. One student was especially absorbed in this task and working very hard at it. So the teacher asked, "What are you drawing?" The girl said, "A picture of God!" "That's very good," the teacher said, "but no one knows what God looks like." She replied, ***"They will when I'm finished."***

Some 600 years ago, a Russian monk named Andrei Rublev addressed that same question of what God looks like in his timeless icon of the Trinity. [PICTURE] He depicts the scene from the Book of Genesis, where God promises Abraham great blessings, a future that depended on a child. As Abraham says: "*O Lord God, what good will your gifts be, if I keep on being childless and have no one to inherit them?*"

Soon after, God visits Abraham and Sarah in the guise of three men, who come to announce the birth of Isaac, the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promises. The couple welcomes their unexpected visitors and offers them hospitality. This is the moment Rublev captures – the three heavenly Guests Who are in fact the Trinity, accepting this couple's welcome and blessing them with the gift of new life.

In Rublev's symbolism, all three figures have the same face, since they are the same God. The eye is drawn by the way each figure looks at the others into a kind of movement – from Christ at the center, blessing the fruits of His Eucharistic sacrifice; to the Father, accepting this gift of the Son's love; and to the Spirit, whose gaze in turn directs us to the Eucharist and to the rectangular niche under the table, suggesting the martyrs "beneath the altar" who will share this sacrifice with their lives, the narrow way that leads to the house of God. The outlines of the outer two figures create a space between Father and Spirit in the shape of a chalice, with Jesus again at its center. The tree by Abraham's abode suggests the Tree of Life, the Cross, that seems to grow out of the Son; the House of the Church resting upon the wisdom and love of the Father; and though hard to see, the Spirit supporting us even if the mountains in

the background may stand in our path. *And perhaps most important: in the middle, there is a space left open at the front of the table. This empty space draws the viewer in, invited to a place at the altar, drawn to Christ through the Eucharist, brought into this communion of love.*

Philip wanted to see the Father; Jesus says that whoever has seen Him has seen the Father. The First Letter of John tells us in three simple words of inexhaustible meaning that “God is love.” Not just that God is loving, or inspires love; he says that God IS Love. That is, the very essence of God is selfless Gift that creates, bestows, overflows with goodness, an endless exchange that IS One Perfect Communion of Love in Father, Son, and Spirit, revealed most fully in our midst in the Cross of Jesus. *So all of this comes together in understanding that when we see love, authentic self-giving love, words and actions that aim at the good of another independent of the cost or benefit to oneself, we see something of the God in whose image we are made. In every act of love that points to Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we get a glimpse of God.*

Rublev asked the question: “What does God look like?” Though we may not be artists in wood, paint, or stone, we are given the gifts we need in Baptism to create a vision of God’s love in the world around us and our relationships with others. *Whenever we see love that draws us to goodness and mercy, we see something of God.* Each week we receive this Love at its source, and then are sent to give it away as Jesus did. In a world that says “No one knows what God looks like,” we reply with every act of love like Christ’s: *“They will when I’m finished.”*