

I speak to you in the name of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

An old Jewish folktale tells of two young brothers who had spent all their lives in the city, and had never even seen a field or pasture. So one day they decided to take a trip into the countryside. As they were walking along, they spied a farmer plowing, and were puzzled about what he was doing.

“What kind of behavior is this?” they asked themselves. “This fellow marches back and forth all day, scarring the earth with long ditches. Why should anyone destroy such a pretty meadow like that?”

Later in the afternoon they passed the same place again, and this time they saw the farmer sowing grains of wheat in the furrows.

“Now what’s he doing?” they asked themselves. “He must be a madman. He’s taking perfectly good wheat and tossing it into these ditches!”

“The country is no place for me,” said one of the brothers. “The people here act as if they had no sense. I’m going home.” And he went back to the city.

But the second brother stayed in the country, and a few weeks later saw a wonderful change. Fresh green shoots began to cover the field with a lushness he had never imagined. He quickly wrote to his brother and told him to hurry back to see the miraculous growth.

So his brother returned from the city, and he too was amazed at the change. As the days passed they saw the green earth turn into a golden field of tall wheat. And now they understood the reason for the farmer’s work.

Then the wheat grew ripe, and the farmer came with his scythe and began to cut it down. The brother who had returned from the city couldn’t believe it. What is this imbecile doing now?” he exclaimed. “All summer long he worked so hard to grow this beautiful wheat, and now he’s destroying it with his own hands! He is a madman after all! I’ve had enough. I’m going back to the city.

But his brother had more patience. He stayed in the country and watched the farmer collect the wheat and take it to his granary. He saw how cleverly he separated the chaff, and how carefully he stored the rest. And he was filled with awe when he realized that by sowing a bag of seed, the farmer had harvested a whole field of grain. Only then did he truly understand that the farmer had a reason for everything he did.

“And this is how it is with God’s works, too,” he said. “We mortals see only the beginnings of his plan. We cannot understand the full purpose and end of his creation. So we must have faith in his wisdom.”

Proverbs tells us that Wisdom, God’s Spirit of Truth, is all around us. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson paraphrases the first four verses of today’s passage to read this way: “Do you hear Lady Wisdom calling? Can you hear Madame Insight raising her voice? She’s taken her stand at First and Main, at the busiest intersection. Right in the city square, where the traffic is thickest, she shouts, ‘You—I’m talking to all of you, everyone out here on the streets!’”

Chapter 8 of Proverbs tells us that Wisdom—a depiction of the Holy Spirit—was created by the Lord at the beginning of his work, present at creation, “beside God like a master worker.” In the first

verses of the first chapter of John's Gospel, we read that "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being." Putting these together we have God, Word, and Wisdom; Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer: the three persons of the Trinity, together since creation, one in three and three and one.

What images come to your mind when you think of the three persons of the Trinity? Despite the fact that we understand God to be greater than we can imagine, we somehow still manage to give God human attributes, usually male, old, and wise. We know that Jesus was a man, and the Gospels teach us so much about his life and his works that we hardly *need* to imagine him. But what about the Holy Spirit? How do we envision the appearance of this third person of the Trinity? Although the images of a dove, or the blowing wind, or divided tongues as of fire tell us how the Spirit works, they are so mysterious, so mystical that we may not be able to relate to the Spirit in the same way we relate to God and Jesus. But what we learn of Sophia, or Wisdom, from Proverbs offers us a much more personal explanation of the third person of the Trinity and what she does in our lives.

Today's reading from Proverbs omits 14 verses that give us some specific explanations: "O simple ones, learn prudence," she says. "Acquire intelligence, you who lack it." "From my lips will come what is right; for my mouth will utter truth." "I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have strength." "I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me." "I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries." The infinite wisdom of God's spirit guides us, protects us, nurtures us, encourages us, loves us—according to our needs, needs that we ourselves may not even know. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." It's the Holy Spirit, the Wisdom of God, who prepares us to hear the hard things and enables us to bear them.

In William Paul Young's novel, *The Shack*, the Holy Spirit takes the form of a "small, distinctively Asian woman" named Sarayu whose voice sounds like music. She identifies herself as "keeper of the gardens, among other things." To Mack, the main character in the story, Sarayu seems almost to be a hallucination, but his experience with her proves otherwise. She invites him to come help her in the garden, then leads him to a plot of ground not much bigger than an acre, filled with the colors of flowers randomly intermingled with vegetables and herbs, a place he finds to be messy and disorderly and confusing, but at the same time stunning and incredibly beautiful.

They come to one particular patch surrounded on three sides by peach and cherry trees, with a cascade of purple and yellow flowered bushes in the center. Despite its beauty, Sarayu asks Mack to help her clear it, to get it ready for something else she intends to plant there. Their work leaves a bare plot of land that reminds Mack of an ugly wound. Only later does Sarayu tell him that the garden is his heart, and the work they've done there together will allow something even more beautiful to grow and thrive there. She is, after all, the keeper of the gardens.

Like the brother who came to understand that the farmer had a reason for everything he did, through the Wisdom of the Holy Spirit, we may come to understand that God has a reason for everything God does. "And this is how it is with God's works, too." "We mortals see only the beginnings of God's plan. We cannot understand the full purpose and end of God's creation. So we must have faith in God's wisdom." *Amen.*