

Scurvy is a disease caused by a Vitamin C deficiency. It causes teeth to fall out, bleeding into the skin, etc. It eventually causes death if not treated. Scurvy has been known for many centuries, but it became especially prominent during the long sea voyages of the age of European discovery. Sailors would be at sea for months or years with no fresh fruits or vegetables. Nobody knew how to avoid or cure scurvy – until 1753. That’s when a British naval doctor, James Lind, discovered that the juice of citrus fruits would prevent scurvy. British sailors became known as “limeys” because from that time on the British navy made sure that all its ships carried a supply of such fruit.

Dr. Lind had discovered a cure to scurvy – but he didn’t know why it worked. The very idea of vitamins and the body’s need for them wasn’t discovered by scientists until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. On this Solemnity of the Holy Trinity, I want use this example from medical history as an analogy for the importance and place of the Trinity in human lives and history.

The doctrine of the Trinity – that there is one God, but in the one Godhead there are three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is the first and most central teaching of Christianity. Furthermore, Scripture tells us that this Trinitarian God is Love. St. Augustine has famously taught that a way to make some sense of this is to think of the Father as the Lover, the Son as the Beloved, and the Spirit as the Love that unite the Father and Son in this dynamic unity of Persons. This doctrine is a matter of divine revelation. We can't reason to it. It had to be revealed by God to us. The other monotheistic religions deny it. But the truth, power, and impact of the doctrine can be seen even in the lives of those who don't believe in the Divine Trinity of love.

Think of the 18<sup>th</sup> century British navy after Dr. Lind. The naval authorities knew both the suffering of scurvy – and what cured it, even though they didn't know why those limes and lemons kept the disease at bay. Those fruits worked because vitamins are real and work in our bodies even when we don't know about them!

So it is with the Trinitarian God who is Love. Although the revelation that God is Love has been unknown to most people throughout history, the impact of that truth has always been with us. While non-Christians don't know God is love they still have experienced love in their relationships with one another. And they have enjoyed the blessing love brings – and also the suffering that living with a deficiency of love brings -- spiritual scurvy, so to speak – even while not fully understanding it. That's because the Trinity/Love is the basis for reality itself – and that reality impacts us even if we don't know exactly how it works.

But, on the other hand, it really helps to know the why of things whether in science or theology. It was a great advance when medical science discovered vitamins and their impact on people's bodies. We could become proactive in our nutrition – and healthier. When we know how and why things work, we make better use of the world and

gain greater health. We don't just have to give the sailors limes – we can tell them how much they need.

So it is with the theological knowledge of the Trinity. It helps us to be better lovers when we understand who Love is and how Love works from the inside. I've preached before about the dynamic of Love. I recently even gave a homily about the theology of sex: how gift of self leads to union, and union leads to new life. But that's the basis, not only of healthy human sexuality, but of all interaction between persons, flowing from the relationship of the three Persons of the Trinity. People are never so much themselves as when they give themselves away as gift to another. That is why the doctrine of the Trinity is so central. It reveals the most basic truth and means to our human happiness. When God revealed who He is in His in-most being, we had the chance to become more expert in love – better doctors of the soul.

This's why it's so important to be ambassadors for Christ – we're like the doctors who want to educate the whole world about scurvy,

vitamins, and nutrition. And if we forget WHO love is, if we forget how love works, it will be a disaster for humanity. That is what a Dark Age really is. It's not just violence – but the forgetting of what we once knew. When the western Roman Empire fell to the Germanic tribes in the 5<sup>th</sup> century European society forgot how to build large buildings of stone and permanent roads. It forgot how to read, and the Greek language of the philosophers and scripture. It forgot classical knowledge of medicine and science.

We think of ourselves as a society that values love above all. But that will disappear if Christianity does, because fully knowing who Love is, and why Love is important, isn't obvious or completely reasonable. It's a gift of Christian faith in the Trinity. Without the faith, love as a conscious motivator in society will gradually fade, and the dark consequences of a love deficiency will continue to multiply in our families, countries, and culture because – like scurvy and Vitamin C – realty is realty.

When I preach about evangelization, I have in mind not only the good of our souls and the souls of our immediate circles. We are fighting for much more. We are seeking to hold on to precious knowledge of who God is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and how this God who is Love, and who is our happiness, best orders our lives. That knowledge is the difference between light and darkness.