

In the movie, “An Officer and a Gentleman,” there are a couple of scenes that show part of the water survival training required to fly with the US Navy. In the spring of 1997, I was in Pensacola, and was training to be an enlisted Naval Aircrewman.

On the first day, you’re required to tread water for two minutes. No big deal. Then you progress through a series of evaluations that include running, swimming, and the obstacle course. You’re required to jump off of a 50 foot tower, swim underwater, and finally to tread water again for two minutes wearing full flight gear – helmet, flight suit, survival vest, boots, gloves – everything.

That last piece was my Waterloo. Try as I might, I could not tread water wearing full flight gear. I had what I thought were good reasons. I’d been swimming my entire life, but that stuff weighed an awful lot. And I wanted to feel the water on my feet and hands so I could gauge my speed.

So, for two weeks, I failed this final exam; and would go back and practice every day for hours. Finally, I was called in to speak with the executive officer. He’s the second in command, and is in charge of discipline. I was told that I had given it a good effort, but that if I didn’t pass this part of the training, I would never get my wings. There weren’t any penalties for this. He said I was giving it my all, but when it came to this – I just didn’t have the “right stuff.”

That didn’t set well with me. In a certain sense, I had passed all the preliminary portions of the training. Physical, psychological, age, all of the requirements. Honestly, I didn’t want to fail. That night, lying in bed, I decided that I would pour out everything I had. The only way I was getting out of that pool was qualified, or else dead. I was that determined.

The next morning, I went to the pool, and got in wearing full flight gear. Nobody expected anything different. But something in me had changed. Literally, I had decided that it was going to be “do or die.”

The instructor blew his whistle, and the two minutes started. I began to tread water fully clothed, wearing a helmet, boots, flight suit, gloves, and survival vest. After two minutes, the whistle blew again, and I was shouted at to continue with the next two parts of the exam.

That is – I had passed. Despite my performance, or lack of performance for the past two weeks, I did have it in me to do this. I was moving forward again toward getting my wings.

In today’s reading, Saint Paul tells the Romans to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God ... [as their] spiritual worship.

What does this mean?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that by baptism we Christians participate in the grace of Jesus Christ, and that this grace is a participation in the very life of God, the intimacy of the life of the Holy Trinity.

And what goes on in the Trinity? The Father gives His very being into the Son, who gives Himself back to the Father completely. This total self-gift is in turn given to us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Without going into too much more theological detail, let me summarize that sharing in the life of the Trinity means being open to receiving this total self-gift of the Father as His adopted sons and daughters, and in Christ returning ourselves totally to the Father.

And this is what Saint Paul is telling the Romans. Human beings are body and spirit. Therefore, in order to fully participate in the life of the Trinity, we not only give spiritual worship to God, but need to physically give ourselves over in worship. This means singing, sitting, standing, kneeling.

And sometimes, this bodily worship, our physical self-gift of ourselves, comes across as suffering.

In the first reading, we hear Jeremiah in his final lament, crying out to God: “You duped me, O LORD, and I let myself be duped.” You see, Jeremiah was told that he was being sent to Israel in order to root out, tear down, re-plant, and build up. God promised Jeremiah that he would be made like an iron pillar and a bronze wall. That although people would fight against him, they would not overcome him.

Sounds like a good deal.

And Jeremiah, after prophesying “terror on every side” to the chief general, was beaten and thrown in prison.

Now certainly Jeremiah was fought against, but he didn’t realize that it was going to hurt this much. He was in pain. He had given up his freedom. All in order to speak the word of God where he was sent.

But, even as good as the deal sounded in the beginning; despite being an iron pillar and a bronze wall; when this general decided to beat on the iron pillar and pound on the bronze wall – it hurt.

And so, Jeremiah cries out. In the original Hebrew, there is a strong implication of intimacy between Jeremiah and God. And despite Jeremiah’s attempts to bottle up the Word of God, it burns inside of him and overpowers him.

And that is what separates us human beings from God. God is almighty, immortal, omnipresent; and we are not any of those things. When we fight against God, we end up hurting ourselves.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to suffer and be killed.

And Peter, who has just hit a high point, in this next moment crashes and burns.

Last week we heard Peter's bold profession of faith, spoken as revealed by God the Father: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

But this week he tells Jesus to stop talking "crazy talk" about suffering and dying.

And what does this show us about the life of the Trinity? Jesus, the Son of the Living God, is trying to explain to the disciples how the total self-gift, the complete pouring out of Son to the Father, is going to look now that the Word has become en-fleshed.

When Jesus, who is the Second Person of the Trinity, truly God and truly human, reaches the point in his life where he is about to give EVERYTHING of himself to the Father – that's when it starts to get messy.

And Peter tells him – don't do it! Hold on here. Don't give EVERYTHING! And in this, Peter is no longer speaking for God, he is speaking for Satan. The life of the Trinity is based on total self-gift. Nothing is held back. And Peter tells the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to stop short of total self-gift.

That's not how God works. That's not how God thinks. But it is how we think, sometimes. And it is how we work sometimes.

But we know how the Gospel story ends. And Jesus doesn't hide any of this from the disciples. He tells them that he will suffer, die, and on the third day, he will be raised from the dead.

Because that is the life of the Trinity. Infinite total self-gift given, infinite total self-gift received, and the same infinite total self-gift returned.

As adopted sons and daughters of God the Father, let us take some time this week in prayer to ask God to reveal to us any places in our lives that we are holding back. Let us ask God to shine a light in the dark recesses of our souls where we don't like to look. And if it is revealed to us any place or places where we are holding back, let us give it over to God and be prepared to receive from God whatever it is that He has been waiting to give to us.

Let us pray to become what God has created us for, and live our lives both spiritually and physically, in the same way that God's life is lived within the Trinity. Let us become the total self-gift that God has created us to be, and that we are called to be by our Baptism.