

Sermon for Sunday 22.5.16. Trinity Sunday.

It is always a privilege to preach a sermon on the Trinity, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the primary doctrine of the Christian faith- it is one that professes a distinctive Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who initiated and fulfilled our salvation history.

It is also a challenge to preach about the Trinity. I remember my college days when I studied Trinitarian theology and how we students became familiar with an unfamiliar language, using Greek terms to gain better understanding of the doctrine that spoke of God as one, yet three equal persons.

Our studies led us through the writings of the New Testament, which in itself does not include the doctrine specifically, yet through which we are able to trace the concept of a Triune God that expresses our belief that the same God known through Abraham and the Jewish inheritance, is known directly in the face of Jesus and the power of the Spirit.

In the earliest worshipping communities, Christians knew themselves as congregations just like we do today, as being in relationship with each other and with God through the Son and the Spirit.

In those very early days of the church however, there developed sectarian differences in the belief that Jesus Christ was indeed divine.

Hence the controversy prompted a clear response to the question of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Lots of debate took place (one can only imagine) and Councils were formed.

In the year 325, the council of Nicaea declared that the Son was indeed truly God.

In 381 the Council of Constantinople, declared the co-equal divinity of the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity committed Christians to an understanding of God as a being in relation.

The creeds were finalised as our statements of faith, and we proclaim that faith still today in the Nicene Creed during our Eucharistic service.

The Cappadocian fathers who formed the councils, proclaimed a markedly new perception of the nature of God in the Father, Son and Spirit, as an inseparable communion of mutual love and nothing other than a single being.

What this means is that in mutual love the persons of the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, give life to one another and without each other they have no existence at all.

To speak of Christ therefore, always means referring at the same time to the Father and the Spirit. This understanding of God came not just from the theology of ancient church fathers but evolved to explain a very real experience in the power of the ministry of Jesus, his oneness with the Father and his resurrection from the dead.

The doctrine of the Trinity I believe, gives us a glimpse of the fullness of God as we see an internal view of God – something of the inside mystery of God – if you like.

In the Trinity we know God by more than his external power, for example, in the creation-

In the Trinity we see personal attributes; the core of God's nature in the self-emptying love of the creator Father, the sacrificial obedient servant nature of the Son and the life giving sustenance of the Holy Spirit.

In the gospel reading this morning we draw even closer to the internal workings, through the wisdom of Jesus in his words to his disciples who were not at that time prepared to bear the new and total identification with him.

He still had many things to tell them but they couldn't bear them then. In time the Spirit would come and lead them on a journey into a faith filled acceptance of truth that their God was not so much transcendent, out there somewhere, but had come among them as one of them and remained with them in the Holy Spirit.

Over the past centuries personal experiences of the Triune God have been expressed in different ways that both witness to the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as witness to a depth of the mystery that inspires others through stories of personal encounter.

Dr. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury experiences the Trinity not as a puzzle, but as a joy that grows out of the life of the Church as a community that celebrates the Eucharist – and I am sure that many of us here would identify with this.

Tielhard de Chardin 20th Century mystic, priest and theologian, is another who wrote prolifically about his experiences and encourages us to trust that the creativity of divine love of the triune God continues on and on in our lives. It makes all that is whole and holy, in and through our response he claims.

And Hildegard of Bingen of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century experienced God's wisdom (that we heard about in the first reading), as the creative outpouring of love and light into creation.

She wrote much about her experiencing the invitation to enter the circle of loving energy of the Trinity in which Christ was the centre.

And to add to these experiences of the Trinity I have brought along today a visual aid - an icon by the Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev, which in its own way expresses something of the circle of loving energy that Hildegard writes about, the communal celebration of the Eucharist expressed by Rowan Williams and the ongoing creativity of divine love that de Chardin experienced.

We see an image of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sitting together around the Eucharistic table and there is space at the table – there is room for you and for me.

The icon expresses the glory of the triune God and his invitation, welcome, and hospitality to each one of us to join in the intimacy of mutual love that grows us, heals us and transforms us.

May we all continue to respond in faith and join in the communion of our God, the Father , the son and the Holy Spirit.

I invite you now to pray with me the prayer on the front page of our pew sheet:

Let us pray:

Mysterious, threefold God,  
Visit my heart  
And there find a welcome  
As Maker,  
Mender  
And Builder.  
Come, my Source,  
My Saviour,  
My Comforter;  
Take me up into the movement of love  
Which flows in your timeless unity,  
Threefold God,  
Father,  
Son and Spirit.  
Amen.

The Lord be with you.