

Sermon for 27.5.18 Trinity Sunday.

Today is Trinity Sunday. Today we celebrate our experience of our *God in relationship* whom we know from scripture. Today we celebrate God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – the one God in union, yet diverse in three distinct personhoods, who create, mutually give and receive, and who exist together in the mutuality of unconditional love.

The Holy Trinity is the Christian expression of the fullness of God, and to articulate this understanding is more than a little difficult.

Like Nicodemus in the gospel reading today even when the most descriptive words by Jesus explain something that is beyond the realm of everyday life, there remains the challenge of understanding the truth that the words expound.

In terms of the early church fathers forming a statement of faith depicting and explaining the Triune God, there were difficulties.

The grand councils of the early church struggled with politics, patterns and words to agree upon a creed that proclaimed with honesty and integrity the Christian faith belief of God as one with three distinct person hoods.

It was in the 4th Century that the Nicene Creed was formulated, and it is the same creed that remains with us today – we proclaim it every Sunday.

Apart from the words of our creed, down through the ages there has blossomed different art forms, icons, to visually express the relational oneness of the Holy Trinity and these art forms I believe, help us in a visual way to grasp something of the concept of the Trinity.

Perhaps the best known one today is the famous Rublev icon of the three persons of mutual relationship in community sitting at a table with space for another to join them. And I have brought my own copy from home for you to see. It's on the table in the entrance.

There is also another art form less known and I have included an expression of it on the front of the pew sheet. This art form expresses the Dance of the Trinity.

It portrays the Trinity as a dance of joy and happiness and invites us into the circle of dance, to join in a mystery that is to be explored, rather than solved.

The Dance portrays the beauty of the three persons as each in the circle of dance share their joy, for the joy of the other. Everything orbits around the other – there is no self-centeredness here – their focus is to glorify each other. Each member makes the other the centre, by self- giving love. The dance invites us be one with them in the celebration of joy.

This concept of the Trinity is not a new one. The early church fathers coined the phrase *perichoresis* describing the Trinity in a “holy dance.”

I believe, it is this icon depicting joyful dance that best expresses what many of the mystics of the early centuries endeavoured to relate to the world about God in community as Trinity.

In keeping with the beauty and wonder of divine visions that we hear in the reading from Isaiah today, I would like to say a little about two of the mystics that I visited on pilgrimage, and their visions and images of the Trinity and how they speak to us today.

In Helfta in the old East Germany - we visited the Cistercian Monastery where Mechthildt of Magdeburg spent her last 12 years of life.

Mechthildt was a celebrated 13th Century mystic who experienced her first visions at the age of twelve, when, in her own words, she was greeted by the Holy Spirit.

Under the spiritual guidance of the Dominicans she led a life of prayer and contemplation.

Her visions and insights that she shared with her confessor were of such content that he did not doubt their Divine origin. By his order she wrote of her experiences and she completed her first book, *The flowing light of the godhead* in 1250, and her further writings were later compiled into seven books.

For us in today's world, the beauty of Mechthildt's words convey a sense of how much the flow of divine love illuminates our world. From her lived experience, she appreciates how we are "mingled", "blended" and "infused" in the flowing light of Trinitarian loving, and in this love we are truly ourselves.

The second mystic I would like to talk about is Hildegard of Bingen. (Germany).

We visited Hildegard after Easter and our time in Assisi with St Francis and Clare of Assisi.

Hildegard was a 12th century mystic and one of the great women of history. She began to have mystical visions at a young age and this phenomenon continued all of her life. She was the 10th child in her family and as was the custom, was tithed to God. She was sent to the Abbey of St Disibod and under the teachings of an anchoress called Uther, learned about the ever present circling love of God and of the Holy Spirit, which "*flows like sap through our lives and through our bones.*"

Hildegard became an abbess, physician, visionary, author, liturgical composer, healer, counsellor, and corresponded with nobility, clerics, even to the great St. Bernard of Clair Vaux and the Pope. She recognised the connection between humanity, the planet, the cosmos, and God and her theology was born out of this understanding of interconnected union.

Hildegard saw humans made by God, as whole beings of unity in body, mind and spirit, and understood sin as being our out-of-touchness with the fact that we are in relation – that our lives are connected at the root and that this is the sacred basis our humanity our lives together on planet earth. She preached in Cathedrals and abbeys about the harmonious nature of the natural world and brought to the congregations and their leaders attention, the importance of our role as stewards of the earth.

Her view of the Trinity is a perfect model of unity through diversity (with each person having distinct roles) and interconnected by loves joyous giving and receiving.

Her most well-known image of the Trinity comes from a vision that she received of the Christ figure in the middle of two outer circles. The outer circle's bright light, designates the Father.

The figure in the middle designates the son. The glowing fire of the inner circle, the Holy Spirit.

I have left of copy of the icon in the foyer for you to view.

Some people use the image for placing themselves as the person in the middle in the body of Christ – surrounded by the light of the Father and the warmth of the Holy Spirit. It is a good tool to bring us into feelings of warmth and strength when we are feeling low or lonely.

Hildegard understood that our calling as Christ's body in the world, is to realise that our role is in the bringing together of all the parts of creation in right relationship and in so doing, join in the joy of the Dance of the Trinity.

And how beautiful and how relevant is this image of the Holy Trinity in our lives today.

The Lord be with you.