

Trinity Sunday 2023 A

SFX

We begin as we did as I entered the Church, we begin as we began this Mass, we sign ourselves in the name of the Trinity. Our minds, hearts, and shoulders (our strength) are shaped by the three and we say "*Amen*" to this cause of our Christian joy that God is one and three, and the greatest manifestation of Triune love is the Cross of Christ. In the name of the Three we were baptised, in the life of the Three we live, and in the presence of the Three we will come at the end of our days.

St Paul loves to end his letters with a blessing and today we heard his words to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." It is a wonderful introduction to this feast, because for the first Christians, the Trinity was not a **conundrum**, some sacred Sudoku, a mathematical puzzle to be solved. It was how they experienced God.

The grace of Jesus Christ – grace, mercy, and salvation experienced in the Son. The love of the Father – God so loved the world! That free self-giving love. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" – communion, participation, a sharing of life. Love, grace and fellowship.

The idea of the Trinity did not emerge as theory, an abstract doctrine. We never say in the creed "I believe in the Trinity"! But we do speak of our experience of the Father's work in creation, Jesus' role in salvation, and the Spirit's ongoing presence in the life of the church.

The revelation of the Triune God came over time. Moses was barefoot before the revelation of God at the Burning Bush, a mystery of Light, the mystery of a name "*I am who I am*", that both reveals and conceals the Divine Identity. And he climbed the Mountain of the Lord, and entered the darkness of the cloud, and heard the Almighty cry out that he is a God of relationship. "*Lord, Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness.*" A God who comes out himself, a God who bends, a God who comes down: that is the experience of Moses.

At the Last Supper the Beloved Disciple laid his ear to the breast of Jesus and hears the language of relationship, of mutual indwelling, of abiding. "*I am in the Father and the Father is in me.*"

We might wonder why the early Christians did not settle for an understanding of God simply as Father and Son. It couldn't. For all its neatness it didn't express the experience of the disciples after Pentecost. God's presence was experienced in quite a different way to that of the Father and the Son. This other realm of experience was more mysterious – like air, breath, fire, energy, fragrance. It was mostly invisible and silent, yet powerful and thrilling.

Some people say: "We all believe in the same God", and in a way it is true. There is just one God. Allah is One, and the God of Israel is One, but we proclaim a God who is One and Three, which has enormous consequences for our understanding of God. We thrill that the most radical revelation of Jesus is that God is a **communion of three divine persons in love**. We rejoice because Jesus has shown us the Father's heart, and given us the Spirit's power. Moses' encounter was leading up to this!

To understand the Trinity the church takes the simple phrase "God is love" and tries to unpack it. Augustine said, "In truth, to see the Trinity is to see love." But what sort of love is revealed?

It is a love that is not static but relational, because at the heart of the one God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit mutually indwelling: giving, receiving and returning love in an eternal exchange. The Christian revelation of God is, if you like, a dance of love, a mutual exchanging of personalities, a mutual exchange of gifts. The Father gives to the Son, and the Son to the Father and that experience is so real that it is a person, the Holy Spirit, the bond of love. They love each other so much that they are singularly one thing.

"Look, they are three", says Augustine: "He who Loves, He who is Loved and Love itself" (ib., 8, 10, 14). The Father - He who loves; the Son - He who is loved; the Spirit - Love received and given - the Holy Spirit."

God is not solitude. At God's very being is, **love in communion, love in relationship**. It is God's nature and will to draw us into that relationship. And so the Church is born from an experience of communion and towards this communion it walks, pulling along the entire creation.

There is a beautiful phrase in the Book of Genesis that anticipates this mystery. God says: "Let us make man in our image and likeness..." Not my image, but our image. And so we are called to mirror this relational existence.

And we become like God through the quality of our relationships, when we know and understand ourselves in the eyes of those who know us, and love us, and relate to us. In the giving of self, and the embrace of the other, we somehow become more ourselves, and more like the Trinitarian God.