

Sermon: Trinity 2 Sunday 21 June 2020

In our worship we have come to the season of Trinity. What ideas do we associate with the Trinity? And what do we experience in the fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?

Some people will think of the traditional rituals and symbols of Christian worship; baptism in the threefold name and the blessing. Other people are reminded of the passionate disputes in the early church and the writing of the creeds. As Christians proceeded in understanding the history of Jesus they had to develop the concept of Trinity. Why? Because of Jesus. He says "To have seen me is to have seen the Father".and "When the Spirit comes he will guide you into all truth."

Jesus then is the revealer of the Trinity. At the centre of our faith is a mutual knowing, loving and participating being. At the beginning is the inner dynamism through which everything else will come. God reveals himself also as the Son, man's redeemer from the innate weakness of man's created being. The radical change came when God as a person became known and loved by humanity. The offering of that relationship presented a gift of true and never-ending life.

The early church's deepest understanding of Jesus' mission and identity is as the cosmic reconciler. The Spirit which descends on him at his baptism fills him in moments of great strength and great need which animates his life and which he renders back to God at the hour of his death "Into your hands" he says, "I commend my spirit". That is the same spirit at work in all of us. For not only in Jesus of Nazareth, but in each of us as well there is a mysterious otherness at work in our lives, shaping our lives to its own end.

What is known of our parenthood is offset by this mysterious unknown that seems to call us forth and drive us along to our destiny. Loving relationships are at the centre of what we believe. In the 4th century the great saints did not so much focus on the individual persons of the Trinity but on the flow of energy between them. In fact the word we translate as person, hypostasis in Greek, does not so much mean an individual, but more a state of being.

Just as water can manifest as ice, liquid or vapour but remain the same chemical throughout, so the great Wisdom school of the 4th century were interested in how change of state, like that which takes place in water, happened in the being of God. They saw that state as an outpouring of love from Father to Son, from Son to Spirit, from Spirit back to the Father.

This community of "being" is an icon of self-emptying love. That love flows from one to the other like shelves on a water-mill constantly filling up and over-spilling into one another. And as they do the mill turns and the energy of love becomes accessible. God reveals his own innermost nature through a continuous round of self-emptying love. On the great water mill of the Trinity the statement 'God is love' brings itself into reality. God moves and flows so that love becomes manifest as the unified centre of all reality. It teaches us that acts of self-giving love are never isolated, no matter how meaningless they look, no matter how disconnected, no matter how unproductive in terms of reward or gain.

The Trinity belongs to that field of relationships of divine exchange and connects us with the whole of God's divine love which becomes manifest in some new and profound dimension. St John of the Cross expresses this in his reflections on the Trinity "As the lover in the beloved, each lived in the other, and the Love that unites them is one with them, their equal, excellent as the one and the other: three persons and one Beloved among all three."

As we practice in daily life, in our acts of compassion, kindness and self-emptying at the level of our being, something is catalysed. This quality of divine love transforms even the blackest of calamities in which there appears to be absolutely no redemption or saving grace. This is attested by an unknown poet who left a prayer beside the body of a dead child in the Ravensbruck death camp during an era of unspeakable human darkness.

It went like this: "O Lord, remember not only the men and women of goodwill but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they inflicted on us, remember all the fruits we have brought thanks to this suffering; our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courageous generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this and, when they come to judgement, let all the fruits which we have borne be their forgiveness."

What an extraordinary testament to the human spirit. Self-emptying love is never wasted. The love of God has power to turn even the deepest hardness of cruelty and atrocity into something new and soft and flowing, That is the love of the Trinity which we come to know and which circulates through all things as the hidden dynamism of love. So God is Trinity beyond our most creative imagination, beyond the limits of our language, beyond the ideas we can conceive. Yet God is not beyond our human experience because God is personal. God is that ultimate mystery of love at the heart of everything we know.

Amen.

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