

The Blessed and Glorious Trinity...

Today is the climax of the church's year. We can recollect the year in aspects of weather, darkness and light; and recapture it in the haunting words from scripture and familiar hymns. Advent gloom but we were commanded to *cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armour of light*. And the hymns have a pure barrenness about them: *On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry* and *Hark a thrilling voice is sounding*. The lights of Christmas, the Christ child *the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*. The pilgrimage of Ash Wednesday and the altar dressed in purple. The late winter light strengthening but the days raw. Just the weather for recalling your sins. *Satan vexing sore flesh and spirit to assail*. And with the daffodils *O Sacred head surrounded by crown of piercing thorns*. Then Easter, Ascension, Whitsuntide – God piles up the rejoicing like a fugue by Bach. White and red and *The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now...*

It's an all-action faith is the Christian faith. Then suddenly this morning a breathtaking dramatic pause. The Holy Trinity. The Being of God himself. The mystery of the Being of God. That haunting verse from *The Book of Revelation: And there was silence in heaven for the space of about half an hour*. Trinity Sunday is not about what God *does*. Trinity Sunday is about who God *is*.

But what can we know of God? The Bible says that God made man in his own image. But we make God in our own image and according to our likeness. A typical picture of God is the headmaster in his study, calling each to account. This one has a cane and an overbearing manner. We are in the wrong before we even step into his presence. He blames and bullies and reminds us of the rules. Behind the veneer of justice, this God hides, furtively malevolent, with a vast regard for his own rank and status. He is petulant. His pretended omniscience, might, majesty, dominion and power, is a sham. It is only a huge repressed violence. This God has a beard. This God ought to go and see a psychiatrist.

There is another, contemporary image of God. He, or more usually she – for she/he expresses her feminine side – is like the schoolteacher who let the kids do what they liked. No insistence on algebra if what they really liked was sticking little bits of blue paper on larger bits of brown paper and calling it *art*. This teacher lets the kids smoke on the school outing. This God has her righteousness and it is expressed in the word *caring*. She is always on her way from the anti-war demonstration to the anti-globalisation rally. Always, you might say, stuck between a *Christian Aid* envelope and a cup of fair trade coffee. This God also has a beard – especially when it's a she.

Then, in this unholy trinity of images, there is a third sort of God. This is the God into whom it is alleged we all just *merge*. The Neoplatonist *Universal*. The morally vacuous and spiritually impotent Nirvana of the eastern religions. Hegel's *Absolute*. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nothingness*. The thin vegetarian soup of the Hampstead Buddhists.

Well, it's easy to mock. Actually, it isn't at all easy to mock and it gets harder by the day as the ideas and opinions put forward for our acceptance become ever more pretentious and ridiculous. But what is God really like? Astonishingly, we know what

God is like. We can enter the mind and personality of God because he invites us to do so. God has revealed himself. This then is what God is really like...

He is Creator. He made all that there is. This was not one act of almighty power – a sort of cosmic spasm – as the deists vainly believe. One thing the Creator God is *not*. He is not the great architect who drew up the plans, laid the cornerstone and then cleared off into sublime isolation. By Creator we mean the living God who upholds the universe – you and me – by the word of his power and by his indwelling spirit.

And then God is our Redeemer. He died to save us from our sins and rose again to lead us to heaven.

And he is the Holy Ghost – God inspiring us, enlivening our time. Being the time of our lives. Sanctifying us. Making us holy and fit to be with him.

On this most holy and mysterious day, Trinity Sunday, we are invited to draw near and contemplate this God as he is. God in the beauty of his holiness. We know our God – and it is not heretical or blasphemous to say we know him. Because he has revealed himself to us. Like the whist player, he has laid his cards face upwards on the table – *Miserere*.

Now follows a little bit of theology for you – and it is as much theology as anyone needs. God is not a being who as it were *happens* to create, redeem and sanctify. God *is* Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Don't imagine God up there in heaven thinking things out. When we say that God made all things, we mean also that he made time. God himself is not in time. So although we are bound to see his works of creation, redemption and sanctification sequentially, they are not like that in God himself. God is eternally Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. That is who God *is*. God is what he does. His existence is his essence.

This means that in the act of creation there are also contained the acts of redemption and sanctification. Or to put this more colourfully: when he made man, God knew that man would fall from grace – that we would make a mess of things - and that we would need redemption and sanctification. This involves apprehensions in us that are almost too much to bear in their heartbreakingness: it means that in the act of creation God willed his own death in Christ. And that he would have to dwell with the likes of us for ever – indwelling, inspiring, sanctifying, God the Holy Ghost.

Knowing all this. That is knowing it all eternally. That is the Blessed One feeling the cursedness of crucifixion and feeling it eternally, God the Holy Trinity still went ahead with the creation. God did all this out of love. Out of love for us. That there might be something rather than nothing. Life for us. For us men and for our salvation.

This then is the mystery of the Trinity. It is love. But love is not what you have been taught to think it is. Love is not a feeling. Love is not an emotion at all. Love is an act of will. And it is a particular and unique act of will. Love is the act of will which seeks only the good of the beloved. That God could love flawed, broken, fickle, faithless creatures like us is the miracle. The measure of the character of God himself. *O that the God of all the heavens should die to save a wretch like me. Love unknown,*

love to the loveless shown that we might lovely be; who for my sake my Lord did take frail flesh and die.

What's the point of it all? Love is the point of it all. God wants so to share his love with us that we become like him. That is the meaning of life, the universe and everything.

And we are asked to grow this love in ourselves and to become it. But remember what love is. It is not funny feelings in the tummy. It is not the sunset embrace at the end of the film. It is not a sentimental consolation for the hard things in life. Sentimentality is not just a weak form of love: it is the opposite and enemy of love as the Devil is the ape of God.

Love is an act of will – to will the good of the beloved. Love is not Schmaltz. Love is tough. St Augustine again says: *The kisses of the pederast are indeed soft and beguiling, and that is their evil. But the rod of chastisement sheweth the father's love.*

And in practice we are to be loving and faithful to one another. Faithfulness does not just mean keeping your hands off the neighbour's wife. It means keeping faith with one another. It means forbearing one another, forgiving one another. It means sticking close to the other when that person is at his most obtuse, petty, hateful, disgusting and destructive. Not giving up on them, but sticking close and willing his good, willing her good. In this way we reflect the love through death to life. The love shown to us by the Blessed and glorious Trinity, three Persons and one God.