

Today I want to preach part two, the conclusion of the sermon of a couple of weeks ago on the subject of this service of Holy Communion. We had got as far as the gospel, so today we take up with the Creed. The Creed is dogma: that is given truth. Modern people have terrible problems with dogma. It's too dogmatic. But actually it is true dogma, truth itself, which saves us from morbid introspection and sentimentality; actually dogma, truth, saves us from intellectual suicide. We acknowledge that mathematics, history, geography, physics and chemistry deal in issues of truth. What sort of a mathematics would it be which said that $2 + 2$ only sometimes equals four or that it is a matter of opinion whether Edinburgh is north or south of Cape Town? If religion is only a matter of opinion, then there is no reason for us to have anything to do with it. Our doctrines, dogmas, are either true or they are false – but they are not vague. They are definite in what they assert.

Of course there is a well-known idiocy which says that we used to be able to believe the Creed but that modern understanding – that exciting thing - has made it incredible. G.K. Chesterton offers a cheerful refutation of this sort of drivel:

An imbecile habit has arisen in modern controversy of saying that such and such a creed can be held in one age but cannot be held in another. Some dogma, we are told, was credible in the twelfth century, but it is not credible in the twentieth. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays, but cannot be believed on Tuesdays.

When it comes to what is basic to thought, there is no neutral ground. If you do not regard Christian metaphysics as basic, then what? Secular materialism? It's a dead duck: intellectually incoherent.

So with these thoughts in mind, we turn to the Creed.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. This is important for prayer and devotion but it is just as important for the practice of science. By declaring that God made the world, the early fathers of the church thereby declared that the natural world is a uniformity and that it can therefore be explored by a universal science. The pagan religions and philosophies believed in many gods, each of which represented a different part of nature, and so they were never able to establish a universal science. That there is a universal science is owing to the Christian belief in the Logos, the Word of God – that is that God is *reasonable*. That is what Galileo implied when he said, *The book of nature is written in the language of mathematics*. One of the greatest mathematicians of the last century, A.N. Whitehead, who collaborated with Russell on *Principia Mathematica*, said *The only explanation for the origin of science is the Christian belief in the rationality of God*

Maker of all things, visible and invisible. If you want an example of the utter mindlessness of the modern liturgies, consider how they have replaced the words *visible and invisible* with *seen and unseen*. But *unseen* is not the same as *invisible*: *invisible* means incapable of being seen by anyone, anywhere, ever. But you might be *unseen* merely because you're hiding behind the sofa for fear of the daleks.

You might not think it, but one of the most important phrases in the Creed is ...*under Pontius Pilate*. This roots Christianity in history. It is not – like Hinduism, Neo-Platonism or Buddhism – a mystery religion: Christianity stakes its claim to be an historical religion. God became man, not as some fine Hampstead figure of speech, but actually in the flesh and blood person of Jesus Christ.

One Catholic and apostolic church, the communion of saints... So Christianity is not some subjective emotional thing you can practise on your own – me and my God. Christianity is social and its society is catholic – which means *universal*. And truly universal beyond time and space to include the church in heaven, the society of our dear ones, the faithful departed.

Now here's something which again reveals the cast of mind of the modern liturgical revisers, bishops, synods and the like. In the Prayer Book's prayer *for the whole state of Christ's church* we pray first for the Queen. In the new versions in *ASB* and *Common Worship* the bishops have put themselves before the Queen.

And in this prayer we pray for *all them who...are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness or any other adversity*. So we believe that God does hear and answer our prayers. Yes, God knows in advance whether a particular sick person will get well or not. But he also knows whether or not you are going to pray for that sick person. God commands you to pray for the sick – and in this he is asking you to possess and reveal that same love and charity which is God's relationship with us. When you pray for the sick and sorrowing, you participate in the life of God, you imitate his love and care; and by imitating it, you yourself come to be a little more Godlike.

We say the *General Confession*. This is not gloomy wallowing in sin. It is encouraging for it teaches us that every time we say the *Confession* we are promised a fresh start. And be encouraged by the words of the *Absolution*. *Whosoever's* Forgiveness is promised by Christ and therefore real. *Whosoever's sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them*. Of course you will go out and sin again. That doesn't make you a hypocrite: it just reminds you that you're not perfect. Make regular confession therefore and try to turn that little bit more towards the light.

So we come to the *Comfortable Words*. *Comfort* here means *encouragement*. And such encouragement can be robust. In Old English a *comforter* was a goad used to encourage unwilling horses. God knows that we need encouragement and that is why he gives us these words of reassurance such as *This is a true saying and worthy of all men to be received...*

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts... The words come from Isaiah's vision in the temple in the year that King Uzziah died when the prophet *saw the Lord high and lifted up*. It is at this point in the Mass that the whole thing takes wings. It moves from the careful statements of true doctrine to the ecstatic poetry of vision. Here we go beyond prose and into the nearer presence of God himself. The words are repetitive, rhythmical and, particularly when this short *Gloria* is set to some of the most glorious music ever composed, we are given a foretaste of heaven.

But the very next lines of the Mass, *The Benedictus*, bring us back to earth and remind us that the gift of heaven was bought at a price. *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!* It is Jesus on the donkey riding into Jerusalem to be mocked and whipped and crucified for us.

And the pinnacle, the holy of holies, *In the same night that he was betrayed...this is my Body...this is my Blood*. Don't get bogged down in abstractions and theories such as Transubstantiation. No theory of what is going on here can explain anything, for we are at the centre of the world of Sacraments, of holy mysteries. What we can rely on is Christ's promise that this is indeed his Body and Blood and when we take it we receive him, really, truly, as he is in himself: his real being; not a mere sign. The words of Queen Elizabeth I are inspiring here:

*Christ was the Word that spake it.
He took the bread and break it;
And what his words did make it
That I believe and take it.*

This is the closest we get to God in this world. The re-enactment of the Last Supper. We are commanded: *Do this in remembrance of me*. But this is not a mere memorial service. The Body of Christ is not his dead body but his living Body. And the original word for *remembrance* is *anamnesis* – which means taking something from the past and making it real in the present. Knowledge is recollection, as Plato said. This is what Jesus meant when he promised that the Holy Spirit would *bring all things to your remembrance*. That is make it real. So when we break this bread and drink this cup, Christ is truly present. We have his promise in St John's Gospel:

Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

We end where we began this great service with the invocation of the Blessed Trinity: *The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost be among you and remain with you always.*

That is to say, when we began we met in his name. Now as we end, we depart in his name. And whether we arrive or depart, this life or the life of the world to come, we have our life only because we are shaped and formed in the name of the Trinity: in him we live and move and have our being. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen