

GOD IS ONE AND GOD IS THREE: CELEBRATING THE TRINITY

One of the most fascinating things about being alive is the other people in our lives. Just as fascinating is the fact that the more we know them, the more there is still to know. Husbands and wives regularly report that even after more than twenty years together they are still getting glimpses of new things about the other. So it's only bit by bit that they can revel and rejoice in all the different and charming things about the other, who will always remain something of a mystery. It's the same with our knowledge and love of God – of God as Father, of God as Son, and of God as Holy Spirit. While God is anything but a closed book, it may take years of keeping company with God before we become deeply aware of particular pieces in the puzzle.

There are at least three ways of delving into the Mystery of the Trinity. One is to search for how something that is one can also be three. In this approach it might help to compare the Trinity to a tree. The Father is like the trunk of the one tree, the Son is like a branch of the same tree, and the Spirit is like the fruit the same tree produces. Or we might compare the Father to the sun in the sky, the Son to its rays, and the Spirit to its heat. Or we might think of the three as like three musical notes played together as one harmonious chord.

Another approach is to concentrate more directly on the relationship of the Trinity to us. The first thing that has to be said about this is that, strictly speaking, God is self-sufficient. In the interpersonal relationships that have existed for ever among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God has been completely and perfectly happy and satisfied. But it is God's overflowing goodness that has led him to create us human beings in his own image and likeness. It is God's overflowing goodness that has led his Son to become a human being like us and live his life for others. It is God's overflowing goodness that has led him to give us our beautiful world to both preserve and develop in a harmonious balance. And it is God's overflowing goodness that has led God to destine us for everlasting life with him on the other side of this life.

The next thing that needs to be said is that the interpersonal relationships of our three-in-one God, show us that to be a person we need other people in our lives, other people to love us, and other people for us to love. In the 1960's there was a popular song that said: *"I am a rock. I am an island. And a rock feels no pain. And an island never cries."* That message is a lie. For while there are times when healthy human beings like to be alone and deliberately choose their own company, there is something wrong if they're always saying like the famous Swedish actress, Greta Garbo: *'I want to be alone.'* This is because we need the company and influence of others to animate us, to draw us out of ourselves, to complete us, to challenge us and comfort us. It's not for nothing that in the Genesis story of the creation of woman, God says: *"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner"* (2:18).

Some time ago I heard about a man who was so utterly alone in this world that nobody ever shook his hand, patted his back, gave him a hug, a friendly dig in the ribs, or even a wave. He became so desperately lonely that the only thing left for him to look forward to was a monthly visit to his hairdresser, where at least for a few minutes someone would touch him

and care for him.

Loneliness can be a sad and cruel experience. This is particularly so for people placed in solitary confinement. I read a while back about a particular prison ward. The prisoners were given enough to eat. But they were not allowed to talk to each other. They were not allowed to work together because work leads to contact and conversation. They were not even allowed to listen to others on the radio or watch television. And of course they were never allowed visitors. After months of this cruel treatment there was not a single prisoner with even a skerrick left of self-esteem or self-confidence.

I hope and pray that none of us here will ever feel so isolated or alone, and especially when we have to face that particular human experience, which no one else can face for us - our death. What happens on the other side of that experience? What will we find there? Our faith tells us, that whatever else there will be, we will enjoy the company of other human beings. And more than that, on the other side of our death God will be waiting for us. The God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The God who has made us. The God who has loved us. The God who has understood us. The God who has forgiven us. The God who has kept us going. The God who has finally taken us to himself.

This is what we are celebrating in our feast of the Trinity. This is why we are giving praise and thanks to God in this Eucharist. Because God is not alone and because we are not alone, and never will be. And so let us pray together and mean every word we say: *“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. AMEN.”*

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