

Homily: Trinity Sunday 2021

Every year on Trinity Sunday priests around the world fret about what to say. “How can I explain this mystery of God who is Three and yet One?” they ask. Well, don’t expect an explanation from me! God is God. We cannot explain Him or exhaust our understanding of Him. He is always mysterious. But, despite that, we can *know* Him; we can even enter into communion with Him. I doubt that anyone here can say that they fully understand their family or friends – we don’t even fully understand ourselves! There is always something mysterious about the other. If this is true of people, how much more is it true of God. So let’s not try to explain Him, but to enter into relationship with Him. That is His desire, and our deepest need.

In the first reading, Moses makes it very clear to the people of Israel: there is one God. “The Lord is God indeed,” he says, “in heaven above as on earth beneath. He and no other.” There is only one God, and God is one: “I believe in one God”, we profess each Sunday. But Moses also reminds the people that God has drawn them to Himself. Here’s what he proclaims: that God has “taken to Himself one nation... by ordeals, signs and wonders”. God has taken one nation to Himself – He has drawn a people to Himself. That experience, given centuries ago to the Israelites, is now offered to all of us. God calls the Church, His people, to Himself. He draws us into His life.

A year or two after I was first ordained, I was working at our cathedral in Lancaster. We had quite a lot of baptisms, but the books we used were old and tatty, so while on a visit to London I called in to the bookshop by Westminster Cathedral and bought a decent liturgical book for the priest to use. These books are generally not cheap – I think it was probably around £40 – but having a book that is worthy, rather than an old pamphlet that’s falling to bits, reminds us of the importance of what we’re doing. And they last for a long time. The following Sunday I was able to use the new book for the first time. When we got to point of baptism itself, I carefully placed the book on the side of the font, then went to pour water over the baby’s head. As I did so, the sleeve of my cassock caught the book, and knocked it into the font, which was quite deep. I watched, almost as though in slow motion, as the book gently floated down to the bottom of the font. Like the Titanic, it sunk on its maiden outing.

But this story helps us to see something of the meaning of baptism. The word itself means ‘immersed, submerged’. We are, therefore, immersed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, submerged in the life of God Himself. We no longer remain outside and distant; the Lord draws us into His own being, He unites Himself with us. St Paul teaches today that the Holy Spirit works within us to make us children of God. He even uses the word ‘son’, even though he clearly means both men and women; he does this to make it clear that we are able to call God our Father just as Jesus, the Son of God, calls Him Father. By baptism, and by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, we are, all of us, children of God, His sons, and we are able to call God “Abba”, an Aramaic word which roughly translates as “Dad”. Our relationship with the Father is the same as the relationship of Jesus to His heavenly Father, because Jesus has made Himself our brother.

The central point of today's feast is that God is relationship; God is love. He is not an everlasting loner, but an eternal communion of love, and has perfect relationship at His very centre. Before any of our universe came into being, there was the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a communion of perfect love. Love existed even before creation. But the readings invite us to enter into that perfect communion, to share the life of God Himself. We do not remain outside, we are drawn in – like the book sinking into the water, except that we don't sink; we are raised up into a life far beyond anything we could achieve or even deserve. When Jesus commands His apostles: "Go, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", He is telling us to bring others to the Lord, so that they too make be drawn into His life. And for those of us who are already baptised, it means this: we are children of God, sons of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus, heirs to eternal life with Him. Here and now we can come to know God and can experience His love; and in the life to come, we can see Him face to face, know Him completely, and experience in its fulness the perfect communion of love which we call heaven.

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