

Homily: Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, 7th June 2020

Tomorrow it's my niece's birthday – she'll be six years old. I wouldn't normally drop birthday greetings into a homily, but I think it leads nicely into a certain aspect of this feast. Our birthdays are great – hopefully they make us feel a bit special, we receive presents and we feel loved. And, best of all, we don't have to do anything to get all this. It's a day when people simply show that they're grateful that we're around, that they love us not because of things we do, but just for who we are. God, of course, doesn't have a birthday – He lives for all eternity; there was never a time before the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – but today's feast is a similar kind of thing. Through the year we have many feasts celebrating all that God does for us: His coming to earth to live as one of us at Christmas; His death on the cross for us on Good Friday and His rising from the dead on Easter day; His coming to us in the person of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and so on. But today is not a day for celebrating what God does; it is, quite simply, the feast of who God is. And celebrating this, we get an opportunity to enter the mystery more deeply.

For the Church, a mystery is not something we hope to solve. Rather, it's something we hope to live. The mysteries of God are beyond our human understanding, but not beyond our human experience. We can never understand God fully, we can never fathom how it's possible that He is one God, yet three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We will never exhaust everything there is to say about Him, or know everything there is to know about Him. There is always more; we can always enter more deeply. But the fact that we can't understand the Lord or know Him fully does not stop us from experiencing Him. We meet Him and experience His presence in so many ways; we have an instinctive sense of God and an in-built desire to search for Him and to worship Him. In fact, only by entering more and more deeply into this mystery can we find real happiness.

If all this sounds a bit abstract, let's compare it to something else that we all know and – hopefully – experience in our lives. I mean *love*. We cannot properly define it; we cannot understand it; it often confounds us. Sometimes we don't even understand the way it works in us! No one has ever fully and adequately expressed what love is, yet we know that it's absolutely vital for life; in many ways it's our most fundamental need. It's a mystery, in the proper sense of the word: it's not something to be solved, but something to be lived. By living it – and only by living it, more and more deeply – can we come to know what it really is.

The comparison between God and love is not really a comparison at all, because – as St John reminds us in the Bible – God *is* love. Today's feast – that God is one God, yet three Persons – celebrates a simple fact: that at the heart of God is relationship; at the heart of God is love. And since love, by its very nature, is not selfish, it overflows. The love at the heart of God overflows in creating the world; it overflows in the kindness He shows us; it overflows in the gift of salvation won by the Incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. "God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost but may have eternal life." It overflows in His gift of the Holy Spirit. It overflows in His willingness to forgive sins, as we heard in the first reading: "Lord, Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness". It overflows in the kindness we so often experience from others, which is always ultimately a gift from the God of love.

God's love also overflows in His Revelation. When you love someone, you want them to know you. It's impossible to love someone and not to want to reveal something of yourself, and the more you love another person, the more you want them to know you – to really know you. We take the risk of revealing ourselves to others, driven by love. God loves us so much that it drives Him to reveal Himself to us – He wants us to know Him, intimately – to be drawn into a deep and powerful relationship with Him. For this, as the Gospel reminds us today, God sent His Son into the world; and as last week's feast reminded us, He sent the Holy Spirit into the world. God makes Himself present, makes Himself known, in the world – His love drives Him to reveal Himself to us, even at the risk of rejection.

Next week we will celebrate another feast which speaks of the love of God made present in our world – the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ: the Eucharist, Holy Communion. In His love for us, the Lord wants to be close to us in this gift. Around the tabernacle today there are 25 candles. Each of them represents a child of our parish – a child who, in other circumstances, should have been receiving our Lord in Holy Communion for the first time this morning. These candles show them close to the Lord, close to the Eucharist, close to Jesus, present here in our church. And we look forward very much to the day when they will be able to receive Him and experience His closeness, His love, in this wonderful way.

After God declared Himself “the God of tenderness and compassion” in today's first reading, Moses responds to Him: “If I have indeed won Your favour, let my Lord come with us.” If You love us, Lord, walk with us, accompany us through life's ups and downs. Never let us be deprived of Your presence, of Your love. And God's love drives Him to answer this prayer, for Moses and His people, and for us today. The Lord always accompanies us, even when we don't feel Him and even when we can't be physically close to Him in the sacraments. St Paul promises the people of Corinth today: “live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you”.

Paul's final greeting in that letter speaks of the mystery of God: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship” – the *communio* – “of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” The communion of the Holy Spirit – this communion, this perfect union, which is found at the heart of God, is also to be part of our life too. In the first place, it means communion with God Himself – by His love, we are drawn ever more deeply into the life of the Holy Trinity, to experience the love at the heart of God and to respond in love. The perfect love, the perfect communion at the heart of God has room for me, too. Love always overflows. And through us, it overflows to others, so that the Church too may be built up in love, united more deeply in the Lord. Humanity is made for love: love between husbands and wives, parents and children, families, our friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ and in the whole of humanity: we are made for love. And this love is a reflection of the love which is at the very heart of God. The reflection is sometimes a little ruffled, but the reality is always perfect. God is perfect love.

Love does not have a birthday. God does not have a birthday. But today we have the opportunity to celebrate the mystery of God and to thank Him for who He is – love which is so perfect that three Persons are completely, eternally and perfectly united in the one God. And we can show our gratitude by offering the only present worthy of Him – the gift of our love.

Fr Andrew

