

Trinity

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Almighty and everlasting God,
you have given us your servants grace
by the confession of a true faith,
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity,
and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the Unity:
keep us steadfast in this faith,
that we may evermore be defended from all adversities;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
one God, now and for ever.

Our text this morning may be found at the conclusion of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13 and verse 13:

'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.'

If I were a betting man, I wouldn't mind betting that most of you present here today know our text off by heart, not perhaps knowing it comes from 2 Corinthians 13 but probably as a prayer often said at the end of a meeting. And another certainty I wouldn't mind betting on is that you will agree with me when I say that at the heart of our Christian understanding of the nature and character of

God is a holy mystery: how the one God we worship is both a unity and a trinity; that, at one and the same time, God is both one and three; that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The mystery for us as Christians is not who God is but how it is possible for him to be one in three and three in one all at the same time.

The question who God is is something we have heard from the beginning, from the first time we ever went to church or to assembly in primary school. Our prayers were normally expressed to God the Father in the name of God the Son and through the power of God the Holy Spirit. That God is our Father, the one who gave us life in the first place, is there in the story of the Garden of Eden. That God was born as a baby boy in the stable of an inn is the story of Christmas and the subject of the Nativity play in which we may well have played a part when we were children. That God is the Holy Spirit is the message of the Day of Pentecost which we heard again in church only last week when the disciples, soon to be apostles, were gathered in the Upper Room for prayer when, with a sound of a rushing wind, the Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of fire, anointing each person present and sending them out into the street to communicate the joy of being filled with the Spirit and wanting to share the good news about Jesus Christ being the Son of God, our Saviour.

The question how it is possible for God to be three in one and one in three all at the same moment, at the same time in different places, is something I can't explain. The word theologians use to describe this state of being, that defies logic and simple arithmetic, is mystery. The Trinity is a holy mystery. Mystery describes that which we can't explain. Now, to my mind, to my understanding,

mystery is at the heart of divinity. We are human beings; we are born of flesh and blood and are embodied. We live for a time and will die for a time. We are very much creatures of a given time and place and culture. How then can we, who are necessarily limited, successfully define and describe that which is so very different from ourselves ? Unfortunately, people believe that we can explain everything; that if something is true, then we ought to be able to clearly explain it once we have put in the necessary time and effort to get our heads round the problem. There is understandable pride in what we can achieve through the power of thought. But here, in the mystery of the Trinity, is something we can't explain: How can this be that God is both one and three ? Yet this is precisely what we as Christians believe to be a true reflection of the reality of our understanding of God.

I hope that helps. We know that God is both unity and trinity but, necessarily, we can't explain how this in logic works. May we have the grace and humility to accept and embrace this mystery which we may not fully comprehend this side of paradise.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

Christ Church, La Manche

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