

Trinity

27 5 18

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, 'Holy, holy, holy. . .' (Isaiah chapter 6 and verse 3) is part of Isaiah's description of his vision of heaven where the six-winged seraphim sing as they fly around God's throne: 'Holy, holy, holy. . .'

Trinity Sunday today and once again the challenge of preaching a sermon on the Trinity, trying to speak with clarity on our unique Christian understanding of the nature and character of God: trying to speak coherently of our unique, Christian insight – that the God we worship is at one and the same time one God and three persons. That God, our Lord God, is One and that he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is a holy mystery: unity and trinity; three in one and one in three.

Essentially in logic, in terms of simple arithmetic, it is impossible for God to be both one and three at the same time. Nonetheless, this is something that we can see in various texts taken from scripture. Though the doctrine itself is not actually stated, there are sufficient references to the triune nature of God which informs our original Jewish understanding that there is, in fact, only one God. Our text from Isaiah in which the prophet is gifted with a vision of angels flying around the throne of God and singing 'Holy, holy, holy' would be to a Jewish understanding of God, a restatement of a given: that God is necessarily holy, separate, set apart. The Hebrew word for holy here is 'qadosh' and the threefold repetition of the word makes the adjective superlative - most holy. But given we as Christians see God as trinity in unity, the triple use of holy has another resonance for us - the threefold nature of God.

So we have something that challenges how we as creatures of flesh and blood who are necessarily time-limited make sense of a being that is eternal, the pre-existent creator of our universe, spirit who took on the form of our flesh in the person of Jesus and who is present now with us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

One way to help us understand how three in one and one in three might work in practice is to offer an image. Here are three I like. One was used by St Patrick who took a Shamrock leaf and pointed out that the one was made up of three parts. Water might be a second: H₂O can be found in three different states depending on temperature: ice, liquid, steam. A third is the idea that one person could have three different identities depending on who precisely is thinking of

them: so one woman could be at one and the same time a daughter, a wife, and a mother while one man could be a son, a husband and a father.

But though helpful, these images cannot ultimately resolve the nature of our God which is necessarily so very different from us. Eternal, outside of time and space, transcendent, God who underpins reality also expresses himself in the flesh of his Son, Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit, like a wind breathing life into our everyday reality.

I hope that helps. We know that God is both unity and trinity but though we can try to understand this holy mystery, we can't ultimately explain the inexplicable. May we have the grace and humility to accept and embrace a fact 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

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 38 : Trinity

