

Sermon preached by the Very Revd. Michael Tavinor at St John, Ludlow on Trinity Sunday, 31 May 2026, on the occasion of the three parishes of St Giles, St John and St Laurence becoming one benefice.

What an auspicious day on which to celebrate your three parishes – St Giles, St John, St Laurence joined in a single benefice. Trinity Sunday – three in one – one in three. Today we celebrate the mystery of the God we serve who comes to us – wonderfully- in those three ways – as God the Creator- as God the Redeemer -and as God within us. Three persons yet one God. Would it be too fanciful to see some hints for our three parishes and one benefice in this great mystery? We'll see.....

First, the doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that each person of the Godhead has their own special and unique attributes and *we need all three*. God the Father – creator, sustainer, source of our very being. God the Son – Jesus Christ, God our friend and brother who walks with us. God the Holy Spirit – within us to inspire us to be God's people in the world. So with you here in Ludlow – each of your three churches, St Giles, St John's, St Laurence - have their own special gifts and you need each other, and will, I know, learn from each other. St Laurence, with its ministry to visitors and pilgrims and those on the edge, passing by in busy Ludlow town; St John's with its ministry to the estates in the town – a very different constituency and St Giles, reaching out into the rural areas surrounding us. We are different but we need each other.

Second. Each Sunday at the Eucharist we say the Nicene Creed and at Evensong we say the shorter Apostles' Creed but there is another one in the *Book of Common Prayer* – much, much longer. *The Athanasian Creed* used to be said on big feast days when I was a boy but I haven't heard it or used it for many years. But there's one phrase in it which is very telling – 'There are not three Almighty's but one Almighty' – in other words, each person of the Trinity is of equal power and influence. So it should be with we three parishes – one may have a larger church, one may have a larger population but none is greater than the other. We are all together – we are all equal in God's sight. There is no room for competition.

Third. The Trinity has been depicted in art in many ways over the centuries. One famous depiction is of the Rublev Icon – the three angels who appeared to Abraham in the Old Testament. The message of the icon and of the Trinity is that the three are united in love and care for each other – the angels seem to nod to each other – to defer to the other. I have this icon in my kitchen – always have - and it reminds me that my home is, I hope, a place of hospitality – and our three churches will be constantly welcoming – each other – and new people – visitors, pilgrims, those in need.

Fourth. What holds together the three persons of the Trinity? Not rules or regulations – not coercion – but love. And that is the way our three parishes will grow together as they get used to being in one benefice – by simply loving one another and by celebrating one another.

You know that in the times I've been with you I've often left you with some 'homework' after my sermon. And I haven't forgotten, people from St Laurence, that I'm with you on 14th June and shall be marking April's homework which you'll recall was to think of ways in which you can offer time to our church as we prepare to welcome a new rector.

Well, here is my homework for all three parishes as you embark on this exciting new venture together. May I offer something from my own experience? All my life and ministry I've tried to be ecumenical – working and worshipping with other Christians. Frankly, in a divided world, I can't see any other creative way. Of course, during 40 years of a busy full-time ministry there wasn't always time to put this into the practise I'd really have liked. But now that I'm retired at Presteigne, have made the decision not to be tribal, if I can put it like that. We have four churches in Presteigne – St Andrew's, Catholic, Baptist and Methodist. Yes, I'm still an Anglican and I worship at the parish church – not every week and sometimes I play the organ there. I attend Mass weekly at our Catholic church and sometimes I take the service at the Baptist church which monthly has shared worship with the Methodists. Do I

spread myself too thinly? Perhaps, but I can tell you that my spiritual life has been greatly enriched by worshipping with different communities and sharing their lives. Might it be so for you too here in Ludlow? I'm not suggesting that you go round all the other denominations – though Churches Together is clearly important. Why not – even occasionally, try worshipping with one of the other churches in the benefice? Not just on official Sundays when we combine, but 'off your own bat' – perhaps if you generally go to St Laurence, say, one Sunday, 'today I'll go to St Giles'. I think you'd be surprised at how effective this can be – not just for you but for the community where you worship that day. Anyway, just a thought and I promise it's homework I won't be marking....

So I wish you well in this exciting new venture together – that God will bless you all and your new rector, as they come to lead you all forwards and to end I want to return to that icon of the Trinity by Rublev and that image within it of each person giving honour to the other – not hugging gifts to ourselves, but sharing them in love and rejoicing in what others have and are. These are words from an anonymous writer of the fourth century. He is speaking of how life should be in a religious community but these words might well apply to each of us as we seek on this Trinity Sunday to celebrate the different gifts in each of our parishes

Whatever they may be doing, the brothers and sisters should bear themselves lovingly and happily with one another. Then one who is working will speak thus on another who is praying: 'The Treasure which my brother has is mine too, since we hold all things in common'. On his part, one who is praying will say of another who is reading: 'The profit which he derives from reading will enrich me too'. And again, a brother who is working will say: 'This is for the community'.

The one who prays will not judge another who is working, for not praying. One who is working shall not judge one who is praying and say: 'Look at that loiterer, while, as for me, I'm working!' A worker must not judge others. On the contrary, everyone, whatever he or she does, shall do it for the glory of God. A sister who is reading shall think lovingly of one who is praying and say to herself, 'She is praying for me too'. And a sister who is praying shall think thus of one who is working: 'She is doing that for the benefit of the whole community'.

Just one last thing about Trinity Sunday – today is a great celebration – of the wonder of the God we worship – and a celebration of a landmark in the story of our parishes. Rightly, the liturgical colour is white and gold, as I'm wearing. But let's note that immediately tomorrow, the colour changes to green – green the colour of nature – the colour we see for most of the year, the Sundays after Trinity, so-called 'Ordinary Time', when we get on with the business – often the slog- of day- to - day Christian living and putting into practice all that we've learned in the seasons leading up to today. So - God bless you all as together we serve our neighbour and our God, day by day.

And now to the community of the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be ascribed as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion and glory, now and for ever, Amen.