

Trinity

It would be easy to talk at great length about the Holy Trinity. It would also be a mistake. So here are some brief thoughts as we ponder this great mystery. It may be helpful to remember how the Christian Church came to develop the doctrine of the Trinity. It came not from some set of difficult words, but from their experience. The first Christians were Jews, people brought up on the Shema, the words they repeated day after day after day which began "The Lord our God is One Lord..." That there is only one God was at the very heart of all they believed. Then twelve men, after spending some long time with Jesus, came to the extraordinary realisation that in this ordinary human being was displayed everything that they knew about God. So they gradually came to use words about him that no self-respecting Jew would have used about anyone other than God. If you want to picture that, think of doubting Thomas, as he is offered the opportunity to touch the wounds of the risen Jesus - he falls down on his knees and says "My Lord and my God". So certainly by the time of the Easter experience, there were those who might be said to have had a Binitarian understanding of God - although they were not silly enough to use words like that! The one God was also experienced in the person of Jesus, who nonetheless had talked about His Father. It was not very logical, but it was true to the real experiences they had had. Then, at that next extraordinary event - the day of Pentecost, they found that what Jesus had promised, about being with them, and the Father being with them until the end of time, being in them rather than alongside them, was also a reality. It wasn't just a feeling, but an event which turned their lives upside down. And they express what they came to understand in varied language. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus, sometimes God's Spirit. It was only then that they began in a ham-fisted and tentative kind of way to use what we call Trinitarian language. It came to them not from a theologian thinking it out and writing a treatise, but from what they knew from their own experience. Let's let your mind wander over your **experience** of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

How we pray is an interesting litmus test of how we think. It is commonly, but not universally the case, that the way we choose to address God will show how we think of him. So some feel most comfortable with God at a distance, as it were, ..."Almighty and everlasting God". Others are still likely to address God the Father, but in a closer way - "Our Father who art in heaven." For many, Jesus is who is addressed. "Lord Jesus, who...." And perhaps for a smaller number the natural way is to address God's Holy Spirit. "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me...". But the other test is how uncomfortable we feel with our less preferred ways of talking. And although we may not be as relaxed with other forms, the chances are that we do not bristle and react badly when someone leading prayers in church happens to use a way of addressing God which is not our personal favourite. Indeed, it is more than likely that most of us will journey in our private prayers from one way of talking to God to another. Do you see how that is the reality of Trinitarian belief taking root in the experience of how we speak to God? We don't, like the people who believe in many Gods, have to choose who is the appropriate one - the God of War or the God of Thunder, the God of the City or the household God. It is all naturally united, for we know that in praying to Father Son or Holy Spirit, we are doing one and the same thing. The subtleties of theology - that we pray to the Father, in the name of the Son by the power of the Spirit are simply subtleties. We are not crass enough to be saying, as it were, to Jesus - "would you mind having a word with the Father". So let your mind drift on the reality of the Trinity in the

way we pray - particularly the way we pray on our own, at home, as well as the formal prayers we say together in church.

It is part of humanity that we need other people - as children we need parents, as adults we need lovers or friends, or more usually both. We are people who mature in and through relationships. If we tie that into the doctrine of creation - that we are made in God's image - then we begin to see why our natural need for relationships is there. God is in relationship - although how that interweaving of relationship is between Father Son and Spirit we can only begin to guess. Here we do put our toes into a pool of great deep and dark mystery, because we don't have the words to do justice to the ideas. There is a lovely poem by a black American writer whose name is currently escaping me, which includes "God said "I'm lonely - I'll make me a world". That is actually totally incorrect. God did not need to create in order not to be alone. There is already relationship in God. But just as human relationships are creative - in terms of reproduction, or of artistic creativity, and lots of other ways, so the fact that God is in relationship naturally led to creation. The whole of creation in all its wonder is an expression of that creative relationship of God. That was expressed long before the Christian era in that ancient myth in Genesis where it says the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters. And when St John came to talk about creation at the beginning of his gospel, he tied that in with the idea of the eternal Word of God - whom we recognise to be Jesus. So he writes "Without him was not anything made that was made." It is in the relationship of Father Son and Holy Spirit that creation occurs. It is in being in touch with God who is Father Son and Holy Spirit that we are most able to be in touch with his creation, and to play our part in sustaining and fulfilling it. So think about the wonders of the world, the universes that God has made - as an expression, an outpouring of all he is, and bring our relationships into focus as a reflection of God's relationship with us. We love, because he first loved us.

Let me end with a prayer:

God our mystery, you bring us life, call us to freedom, and move between us with love. May we so participate in the dance of your Trinity that our lives may resonate with you, now and for ever. **Amen**