

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

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'Make disciples... in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' (Mt 28:16-20).

Today's Gospel reading is a summary of the entire Gospel of St. Matthew. On an unnamed mountain in Galilee it does not say the disciples saw Jesus leave for heaven. They adored him and he missioned them, with the promise of his presence always among them until the end of the age. He had disclosed who God was in and through everything he had said and done and was. This they were to transmit to the whole world. For Matthew the story of Jesus had begun with Abraham and finished with the prophecy made to Abraham fulfilled and being fulfilled: all the nations of the earth would be blessed in him (Gn 12:3). It was very personal.

Biblical Language

Much of the Bible unfolds a narration of the chosen race as sustained personal experiences. People with names punctuate the entire drama. At the heart of it all is a personal God. To call this Living God by that rather mathematical term-Trinity-was a late Christian designation of his being. It seems that it was the early Latin Father Tertullian (c.155-222 AD) who used the title for the first time, speaking of the one God as three persons in one nature as Trinity (Unitas-Trinitas). Later heresies necessitated greater precision and so we were presented with the catechism terms we learned at school: God as a unity in nature at the same time as three distinct persons. Finding the least inadequate language to express the mystery always proved and still proves to be very difficult. Once Church heresies had been dealt with, the Bible presentation could be evoked again safely as a very helpful way of expressing believing experience in the warm human and humanising categories of love relation-ships.

Examples

Little examples from ordinary life will help us see this. People who have a public office, political or social, are far from us as long as we only know them by the titles they bear. Thus when we talk of our father or mother or parish priest or teacher, these designations have no flesh and blood for us at all until we get to know them personally. If we were just to name them for our friends, as we do in filling out official forms, our friends would have no reason to have much further interest in them at all. It is when we begin to talk about their characteristics, the kind of things they say, the sort of things they stand for, even

their physical appearance, and their sense of humour, with all their warts and pimples, that personal interest in them can develop.

Now it is not altogether unlike that with God in biblical discourse. There we are presented with God as Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Thus we can engage affectively and personally, as we see how God is addressed in the Psalms, for instance, and in the language of Jesus. It is the language of personal relationships. It is the normal language of prayer.

The Father

Our Father, so Jesus taught us to pray. We are invited to recall that a Father means something profound for us. He is at the heart of the family, who ideally with mother takes pride in our achievement, who does not overawe us by showing how much better he is than us. God is a Father. He knows about love. God the Father in Biblical terms is the one who supplicates the Jews to be faithful, to be kind to each other, to have a care for those who have no father (The Ten Commandments). He insists that it is Israel's purpose to tell the world that he is the Father of all, that he fathered them in his own image and likeness (Gn 1:26), that he loves them with an everlasting love (Jr 31:31ff.). It is because he mediated all this to us in and through community that we can love him..the best community should be the family. We have experienced him in our life; abstractions do not create reciprocal relationships. In our prayer we are personal, always concrete, expressing needs and thanks. It is all very real.

The Son

God the Son we know as Jesus of Nazareth. In his history we have come to know the eternal Son. He was experienced as God with us. He was with the Father at the creation of the world (Jn 1:1ff.). He came as a human being for others: he had the mind and heart of the one he called his Father. I do everything that pleases him, he said (Jn 8:29). Matthew recorded him saying that the heavenly Father knew 'we' needed all the things we worry about, that the very hairs on our head were numbered (Mt 5-7). When believers met Jesus then God seemed ever more a Father. His relational deportment taught anew what sonship really was: devotion and care, care for what the Father cared for - following the path of love, even to the point of dying for others. But in departing he would not leave believers orphans: the Holy Spirit, the expressed love of the Father and the Son would come as the God of all consolation (Jn 15:26).

The Holy Spirit

The description of the presence of the Holy Spirit is again profoundly human: He was sent to comfort, to console, to water the arid wastes of selfishness, to keep the wilful from going astray, to assuage the pain of those who are lonely in the world, as the wonderful Pentecost hymns proclaim him. We pray to him for wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and the fear of the Lord. It is all so realistic, existential, the here and now of our daily existence. Putting it simply it registers as personal experience in our normal life, for which we pray to God and to whom we give thanks on being helped.

Conclusion

So today in celebrating the Holy Trinity we are adoring the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and of the Apostles, the same God who has been adored down the centuries. We are genuinely conscious of our inability to talk about him except through inadequate words helped out by inadequate images. We know the essential about him for we have seen him in creation and history, seen him in the face of Jesus, seen him in the work of the church, perhaps seen him in our closest friends. God remains still a profound mystery. And because he remains so we continually say: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A Happy Feast to you all.

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