

## Sunday 7 June 2020 Trinity Sunday

**COLLECT** 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.

**FIRST READING** *Isaiah 40:12-17. 27-31.* Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the spirit of the LORD, or as his counsellor has instructed him? Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales; see, he takes up the isles like fine dust. Lebanon would not provide fuel enough, nor are its animals enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Or *Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a*

**PSALM 8 R** [O Lord our governor,] how exalted is your name in all the earth. O Lord our governor, how exalted is your name in all the world! Out of the mouths of infants and children your majesty is praised above the heavens. You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries, to quell the enemy and the avenger. **R** When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in their courses, what are mortals, that you should be mindful of them? mere human beings, that you should seek them out? You have made them little lower than the angels; you adorn them with glory and honour. **R** You give them mastery over the works of your hands; and put all things under their feet, All sheep and oxen, even the wild beasts of the field, The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea. **R**

**SECOND READING** *2 Corinthians 13:11-13* Brothers and sisters, put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

**GOSPEL** *Matthew 28:16-20.* The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**POST COMMUNION** Almighty and eternal God, you have revealed yourself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and live and reign in the perfect unity of love: hold us firm in this faith, that we may know you in all your ways and evermore rejoice in your eternal glory, who are three Persons yet one God, now and for ever.

## Sunday Homily 7 JUNE 2020 TRINITY SUNDAY

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19

Let me begin this address with a very short scriptural text: “Don’t say ‘Three’!” You may wonder where that comes from. Well, it’s not actually from the Bible but from the Qur’an, the scripture of Islam. The Qur’an warns Christians: “Don’t say ‘Three’!” It’s a sharp rejection of the doctrine of God as Trinity, Three-in-One. On this Trinity Sunday it’s salutary to recall that many millions of believers in God see the doctrine of the Trinity as a serious mistake. Muslims passionately defend the oneness of God. They also believe in Jesus, but as a human prophet, not as the Son of God. They believe that Jesus and his original followers simply believed in one God, but that later Christians drifted away from this pure monotheism into errors about the Son of God and the Holy Spirit and so into the seemingly contradictory idea that God is both three and one. Other religious groups (Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example) also reject Trinitarian Christian faith in favour of a unitarian faith in God just as one. But for 1,400 years the challenge from Islam has posed some of the most searching questions Christians have had to face. One response to this challenge might be to regard the doctrine of the Trinity as a problem, an obstacle in the way of good interfaith relations. (“Okay, we’ll stop saying ‘Three’, or at least won’t make so big a deal of it...” ) Some Christians have been drawn in that direction; but recently there has been a recovery of confident belief in the Trinity and Christians have been realising afresh that this doctrine is neither an optional add-on to our faith nor a problem to be embarrassed about. It’s simply the best way of understanding what the New Testament says about Jesus and about the Christian experience of God.

In today’s Gospel the risen Jesus commissions the eleven to make disciples of all nations, “baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. This is a pivotal moment in the Christian story: Jesus is saying that his own relationship with God is now to be opened up to all people; they are to be baptised (or “immersed”) into the life of God the Trinity.

Let’s think further about Jesus’ relationship with God. Throughout the story of Jesus we see his constant sense of himself as the Son, loved by the God he calls Father. And Jesus doesn’t speak only of the Father; Jesus knows the love and guidance of the Father through a distinct personal presence whom he calls the Holy Spirit. Think of Jesus’ baptism in the River Jordan. As the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus he hears the Father saying, “You are my beloved Son”, and is commissioned for the work which lies ahead of him. The love of the Father is poured out through the Spirit on the Son and returned in the loving obedience of the Son to the Father, again through the Spirit. This is God the Trinity, the Three-in-One, the God who is loving relationship in God’s very self. And this has always been so; from eternity God has been Trinity. But in the life of Jesus, God made flesh, we see something of the Trinitarian life of God active in our world.

Very nice for Jesus, we might think. Very nice for the Father, and for the Spirit too, but so what for us? Well, so a lot for us, actually. The point for us is that Jesus’ relationship with God is opened up to us. We are invited to join in the relationship of love that flows within the life of God that has been there from eternity and was seen in our world in Jesus. Jesus takes us by the hand and says, “Come with me and be led by the Spirit into the presence of the God I know as Father.” We are to share in the life of the God who is love. When we were baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, we were immersed in the life of the God who is love. And, as we see in Jesus, that life isn’t static, but active, outgoing, self-giving. From his baptism onwards, Jesus’ relationship with God was bound up with a mission, the life-giving, renewing, liberating mission of God in this world. So also for us. On this Trinity Sunday may we and the whole Church of Christ be renewed in our faith in the God who is eternally love; and may we respond with joy and obedience to the call both to share in God’s life and to participate in God’s mission in the world.

## THE MOST HOLY TRINITY 2020

Aristotle remarked that human beings are political animals. He was not speaking of parties, nor of ideologies. He meant we are designed to live in the *polis* i.e. community made up of families grouping together. The basic political unit. The fundamental idea was that we *flourish* in community. We learn by imitating others and being taught by others. We love telling stories-note the St Peter’s Friendship Group during this time of separation-we have

a need to create and we build and trade. Even the hermit can only be solitary because he or she first belongs to the human family.

As well as the social aspect, we can also have a rich interior life. We imagine, daydream and capture in our minds the essence of things. Above all we can understand and communicate understanding with words and concepts. We are the only animals to keep diaries to record and reflect on our inner life. All this occurs because we are built to a certain pattern. Like a painting, we carry the signs of the artist who made us; we might say we have the signature of the Most Holy Trinity.

What does this mean? As the Incarnation reveals, God is eternally one, but also a communion of Persons-in Latin *substantia*-essence and *personae*-persons. Hence in the Creed we speak of Jesus as *consubstantial* with the Father-having the same essence. The interior life of God is the eternal communion of love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit-one sole God in essence, with three distinct Persons. St Paul speaks of the grace of the eternal Son; the love of the Father; and the fellowship, or communion of the Holy Spirit. This might help us enter into the mystery that all three possess all three characteristics. God reveals the names, Father, Son and Holy Spirit to draw us into the mystery, to help us communicate with the Holy and Undivided Trinity. This is a reality in which we only part participate when we enter into the eternal love of the Three Persons in Heaven. Here we have to exercise our spiritual muscles to receive the reality of the Trinity. Some of you may remember a homily I preached with Duncan Nash at my side, using his physical muscle to juggle with three identical coloured balls- the Three in perfect harmonious motion. We are social creatures in motion and interacting with each other, because God is communion. We are rational creatures because the divine Trinity is the source of reason, order and intelligence.

We have then the maker's mark, the artist's signature. But there is more than making; there is redeeming. The Eternal Word, the second Person of the Trinity whilst never ceasing to be God took our human nature. God could have redeemed us with a command, but wishes to enter into the life of his beloved creatures to heal and to raise them to participate, by grace, in the divine, eternal life. So great is God's desire to share communion with us that Jesus, both divine and human, was prepared to suffer and die on the Cross to communicate that love.

Not content only with dying and rising, Jesus sent the gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell within the Church and dwell within each of the baptised. The whole Trinity therefore dwells within us when we live a sacramental life in the Church, when we pray in our life of good works. Without that divine life, healing and enlightening us, we would not be able to make the sign of the Cross with any conviction.

St Elizabeth of the Trinity had an especially vivid awareness of the in dwelling of the Blessed Trinity. An ordinary girl from an ordinary family she was graced to experience profoundly the divine Persons in her daily life. She wrote, "O my God, Trinity whom I adore! Grant my soul peace. Make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling and the place of your rest." We are made for communion, communion with each other and communion with God.