

The Most Holy Trinity – Year A

The feast to especially honour the Blessed Trinity was established by Pope John XXII (1316-1334) for the Sunday after Pentecost. Describing God as a Trinity is an expression of a uniquely Christian experience of God. The followers of Jesus understood that God was communicated to humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. In the gospel of John, Jesus is portrayed as the one communicating what we need to know about God. In effect, Jesus was the human form of God among us. The actions, the words and the very personality of Jesus reflected the reality of God, to the extent that there is an identity between Christ and God. Along the same lines Matthew in his gospel refers to Jesus as *Immanuel*, which is Hebrew for God is with us.

The early Church fathers saw that if Jesus was our saviour then he had to have a special standing with God, and this led to a realisation that Jesus shared somehow in the divinity of God. Because of the limited nature of human language, the analogy of family was regarded as the best way to describe the relationship in the Godhead. This gave rise to the idea of Father and Son. The Holy Spirit was understood to be the expression of the love of the Father and the Son, having a distinct relationship with the Father and the Son. In short, we confess that there is one God in whom there are three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The best theological minds of Christianity have reflected on this mystery and philosophical solutions seem to be inadequate in their attempt to express the depth of the reality. But the technical philosophical language basically comes from the Christian community's experience of God, which, in its simplest narrative terms goes something like this: God, who created the universe, became human in a particular man and still dwells with the community giving it life and guiding it.

Exodus 34:4-6; 8-9 The scene in this reading is of Moses going up the mountain again with new tablets of stone as God had instructed him. Remember, when Moses came down from the mountain the first time he smashed the original tablets in a fit of fury at the sight of the people paying homage to the golden calf. This was an obvious symbol of the breaking of the covenant promises and the trampling underfoot of the ten statements (Hebrew: *esrim devarim* = ten words).

Moses asks that God might forgive and undertake ownership of the people

It was early morning and the Hebrew says simply that God came down in a cloud and stood with Moses. This says something about a reality that is personal and not just a concept or an imaginary impression. The cloud is the visible manifestation of the divine Presence – the Shekhinah. Moses addressed God as the God of compassion and graciousness, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness and dependability.

While worshipping God, Moses expresses a deep desire for relationship with the divine. He begs God to be always with the people of Israel, 'Please go with us, be in our midst, Lord'. He admits the people are headstrong with many faults but asks that God might forgive them and take ownership of the people. This kind of covenant loyalty was equivalent to family relationship in the ancient Middle East, and so love expressed as loyalty and reliability was an integral part of this bond.

I am reminded here of the scene in Matthew 23 where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem lamenting the fact that the people wanted no part of him and yet all he wanted to do was gather them as a hen gathers her chickens in warmth, protection and gracious love. All he sought was genuine relationship that would lead to quality life and authentic peace for all who embraced his values.

2 Corinthians 13:11-13 This extract is Paul's final greeting and blessing at the close of the second letter to the Corinthians. He wishes happiness and well-being on the community. The Greek word *chairete* means rejoice while delighting in a state of well-being. Then Paul exhorts the Corinthians to grow in maturity and strive for wholeness. The Lectionary translation has 'try to grow perfect', which really doesn't help, nor does it truly reflect the Greek idea of striving for excellence, that is, achieving one's potential, not trying to do the impossible and be perfect.

Paul's next appeal is, encourage and console one another. He uses the Greek verb *parakalēō* which means support, stand by, encourage. You'll notice the word Paraclete comes from this verb. Then Paul recommends a spirit of unity, and our translation has 'be united', which is accurate, but the Greek more precisely says 'be of one mind' that is sharing the same values and spiritual priorities. Paul assures the community that if they live out his recommendations then the God of love and peace will reside in their

midst. Notice the connection here with the plea of Moses in our first reading that God would be pleased to reside with the people of Israel.

It is small signs of true appreciation and affection that help bind families and communities together

The expression ‘greet one another with a holy kiss’ may not sit well on everyone’s ears because it has a cultural loading. However, it is no more or less than the kiss or hug of affection that is common in European and Eastern societies. The Greek verb *aspázomai* means ‘greet’, but implies a recognition of another person in word or action that shows affection or affirming relationship. It is small signs of genuine appreciation and affection that help bind families and communities together. Paul is not referring here to the common air-kiss. The apostle then passes on the affectionate greetings of all those in Ephesus, where he is writing from, who are committed to Jesus Christ. He is accustomed to referring to his fellow Christians as the saints, that is, those dedicated through their baptism and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Paul ends by wishing the grace (*charis*) of the Lord Jesus Christ on the community. The Greek *charis* has a few shades of meaning but the main ones are graciousness, favour, generosity, goodwill. I think the term ‘grace’ can have a richer meaning if we think of it as graciousness. Even a familiar formula, like the Hail Mary can have added impact with this word: Hail Mary full of graciousness or filled with divine favour and goodwill.

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is the *koinōnía* of the Holy spirit. This refers to an association of mutual relationship implying fellowship between Christians and their God. While Paul does not imply a doctrine of the Trinity as developed in later Christian thinking, we can see here an allusion to the roles of the persons of the Trinity in relation to human beings.

John 3:16-18 The gospel reading contains a reflection on the words of Jesus to the Pharisee, Nicodemus. There are overtones here of the statement of Moses in the first reading about the faults and failings of the Israelites. The point in this gospel reading is that in view of the sorry state of this alienated and undeserving world it would take an enormous kind of love to die so that the world might have life. Salvation can be understood as Christ’s rescue mission for our sake.

The reference to ‘believing in him’ is not a statement about a set of beliefs or doctrines. The Greek *pistéuō* used here describes the process of considering something to be authentic and therefore worthy to be trusted and relied upon. We can commit to something or someone we hold to be true and depend on it. Remember, the opposite of faith is certainty, not doubt. Doubt can be open to persuasion or convincing. Certainty tends to be immovable as it shuts the door on other considerations.

The richness of today’s feast and its readings emerges as a focus on the jewel of relationships and the happiness and peace that derives from mutual listening and understanding. Just look at the news coming from the USA to see what happens to communities when alienation and discrimination are taken to the extreme. Let us name our relationships, cherish them and build on them through encouragement and generosity.



Grace is a certain beauty of the soul, which wins the divine love.

St Thomas Aquinas

Money giving is a very good criterion of a person’s mental health. Generous people are rarely mentally ill people.

Karl Menninger (20th century leader in American psychiatry)



A wealthy woman was giving a garden party with several well-to-do guests attending. During the festivities two gardeners were out on the back lawn working. One gardener was busy weeding, when the other suddenly leapt high into the air, spun around and hopped a few steps.

One of the guests was taken by his grace, and remarked to the hostess, ‘That man is such a talented dancer. I’ll give him five hundred dollars if he’ll dance at my next party.’

When the hostess asked the first gardener about this proposal, he yelled, ‘Hey, Doug! Do you think for five hundred bucks you could step on that rake again?’

Laurie Woods