

Convent 2016

Today the Church celebrates the Holy Trinity. It is not as obviously dramatic and exciting as Christmas and Easter. Many churches celebrate September and October as the time of creation, and this is followed by the season of Advent, when we are prepared for the coming of God in mercy and judgement, which was followed by the celebration of Christmas and Epiphany, then the series of events through Ash Wednesday and Lent, the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Good Friday, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and finally the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which was last Sunday. So we have celebrated the actions of God the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Life-Giver and now we put them all together into Trinity-tide which is the celebration of God Himself.

The first positive thing I want to mention about the Holy Trinity is that it is a social Trinity, it is the life of a social God. The Orthodox Churches of the East have a beautiful way of describing this. They use an ancient Greek word which means 'dancing in a circle', like the chorus in the ancient Greek theatre. This means that the persons, or the modes of God weave in and out of each other in a dynamic circle.

This social God offers us a model for our human community. If God was revealed as a solitary God, so to speak, it would be too much like the rule of a benevolent dictator, and if it was a binary revelation, just two persons, the Father and the Son, this would

suggest a kind of mutual preoccupation of one with the other like two human lovers, who only have eyes for each other. But three is a society.

Moreover, it is a society of equals, for the persons of the Trinity are equal in that they equally form the society of the Godhead, and so Christian communities should also be communities of equality, of mutuality, and of joyful sharing.

Secondly, the Holy Trinity is an inclusive society. On the one hand, it is true that God is in Heaven and we humans are on Earth. God is often described as being wholly other i.e. completely different and unique from us. But for Christians that is only half of the story. In John chapter seventeen, sometimes described as the High Priestly prayer of Jesus, Jesus prays that those who love him may be one with him, just as he is one with the Father. In other words, the unity of love within the Holy Trinity includes us within its blissful circle. Again, we can turn to the Eastern church to find a word for this, and also we look for it within the teachings of our 19th century Evangelicals. The Orthodox Churches speak of the process of theosis, the way that human beings may be transformed so as to share in the very nature of God. There is indeed a place in one of the later letters of the New Testament where the apostle speaks of us 'becoming partakers of the divine nature'.

This means that in our human communities we should also seek to be inclusive. The church becomes the mirror of the Holy Trinity when everyone

is accepted whether male or female, white or black, rich or poor, gay or straight, a-sexual, bi-sexual and transsexual. There are borders around the Christian community, but these should be porous. The church is, or should be, marked out by a series of welcome mats, and not by a brick wall!

Now our thoughts must take a darker turn. God is not only social and inclusive, but is also a suffering God. In the early church, people did not like to speak of God the Father as suffering. They somehow thought that this was inappropriate for the divine nature. They believed that it was only as the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ that God suffered.

Today, however, that point of view is much less common. In his wonderful description of the unity of the human body, St Paul says that when one member suffers all the other members of the body suffer with it. If this is true of the human body, how much more true must it be of the three - person-ed God, each of whom dwells in and for the other? Just think of it in human emotional terms. How could the Father see his Son suffering on the cross and not suffer with him? This would take us into the cruel idea that the Father sent the Son to suffer, or even punished the Son! This would indeed be God the abusive father. But we believe that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, and in this action God accepted responsibility for the suffering world, and participated in it.

Finally, God is the one who was and is to come. Some people say that this could also mean the God who was is, and who will become. For if God is the perfection of being, why should not God also be perfect in becoming? If we think of God in this way, we may regard God as being always a God who is in process. The life of God is enriched with all the novelty, the newness of life. In this sense, God is continually being magnified, surpassed by none but continually surpassing himself.

So God is not the cold, distant first cause, the one who setting everything in motion stands back at a distance to watch it. No, the Holy Trinity is the companion of the cosmos, the one who adventures in freedom, with the freedom of creation. The one who as the Jewish proverb says 'endows our finite days with eternal worth'.

Let us then rejoice in the richness, the harmony, the suffering heart, and the promise held out by the God the Holy Trinity. Let us model our communities upon the society of God; let us be as inclusive as the all-loving God; let us participate in the suffering of the world from which God has nowhere to hide, and let us live in hope that beyond all expectations, beyond all despair, there is one who is to come, and who is still yet to be.