

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Today is Trinity Sunday. The one day in the church year that we are reminded that God is the three in one – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. None of our readings for today will really help us understand what the Trinity is all about. That is because it's a doctrine that was determined in the 4th and 5th centuries after considerable debate and controversy. It's an equally difficult task today to understand the reality of a Trinitarian God, as it was 1600 years ago. St. Athanasius in the 4th century described the Trinity as “incomprehensible.”

Today's short gospel reading from Matthew refers to the Trinity only to the extent that Jesus gives the disciples the Great Commission. That is, he commands them to baptise in the name of the Three in One:

19 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.” That command does not enlighten us any more about the nature of the relationship, but simply states the words the disciples are to say. We still say these words. And in an emergency, these words can be said by anyone, whether or not they are Christian, and the baptism will still be valid.

In the very early church, baptism was done in the name of Jesus¹. The threefold baptismal formula (“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”) was adopted later. Being baptized *in the name of* indicates a new relationship, a rebirth, an adoption. Being baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit indicates that the new relationship involves all three faces of the Trinity.

We are talking here about the Trinity. But that is not the same as understanding it. And like all Christian doctrines, we can only begin to understand its true depth, complexity, and importance, when viewed from the perspective of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And everything we believe about God comes from what we've seen of God in Jesus Christ. God became human in the person of Jesus by the power of the Spirit. And this Jesus died on the cross and rose again. God, in human form as Jesus, gave himself to die, so that death could be defeated once and for all for our sake.

To say that God is Triune, three in one, is to say more about God than many people want said. Most people in our society appear to want God to be generic, abstract, vague, and distant. “God” for many of us is this large, undefined concept that we can make to mean just about anything we like. Something “spiritual,” someone whom we can make over, so that God looks strikingly like us. But in Jesus, God got physical, explicit, unique, and came close to us. Jesus Christ is God in action, God refusing to remain a general idea, or a grandiose principle. Jesus Christ is God in motion toward us, God refusing to stay enclosed in God's own divinity.

We may attempt to make Jesus into a wonderful moral teacher who was a really nice person, who enjoyed lilies and was kind to children, and people with special needs. Jesus, from the first, refused to be managed by us. From the first, his followers concluded that, “Jesus is not only a human being but also God.” They started saying things like, “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Corin. 5:19).

This was saying more about Jesus than that he was a really fine person, who set us a good ethical example. God is One; but not simply One, not merely One. We baptise in the name of the Trinity thus showing that baptism relates us to the fullness of God.

When we say the words of the Apostle's Creed, “I believe in God, the Father almighty, ... I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit,” we accept a much more

¹ Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27

complex and challenging view of God than most people believe. You would think that we would say, “I believe in God the father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,” and leave it at that. After all, most people of Christian faith would probably affirm that. But the Creed goes on to affirm that God is also the Son, Jesus Christ. And then the Creed says that God is also the mysterious, dynamic, revealing, Holy Spirit. And yet, ...there is only one God.

The Trinity gives us perhaps the most complete understanding of what God is like: God creates us purely out of his love and desire for relationship; relentlessly pursues us, even stepping in to offer to die so that we might live; and abides with us.

The Trinity helps us see God more fully as God is. It refines and purifies our understanding, our theology, even our evangelism. It is the God we meet in the inexplicable unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who, at every moment, asks, “Whom can I send as a prophet to tell the world about me?”

May each of us, strengthened, purified, and nourished by that self-same God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in humility and boldness, say, “Here am I, send me.”

AMEN