

Trinity Sunday
Year C - 16/6/2019

Proverbs 8:1-4,22-31

Psalm 8

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

Late in the fourth Century of the Common Era, the great Augustine of Hippo, one of the very early Christian theologians and philosophers, wrote what is described as an 'endlessly long' book, entitled *Dei Trinitate* ("On the Trinity"). In it, he lays out a series of arguments and propositions regarding the theoretical and theological importance of the Trinity. His treatise concluded his with these words, "We have said (all) this not in order to have said something, but in order not to have remained altogether silent."

Well, Augustine, I'm with you there! To try and explain the Trinity; let alone in a 12 minute sermon, is right on impossible, and so I am conscious that whatever I say this morning will be incomplete and lacking in any real substance; but that, nonetheless, it is important to say something!!

It is telling to me that a lot of the theological resources we have to think about the Trinity were written by people such as Augustine and his contemporaries - and in 1600 years we really haven't got much better at our understanding and ability to speak about it. And the reason for that, I think, is that the Trinity rightly teaches us that God is not a mystery to be rationally quantified and believed, but rather a mystery that can only be worshipped.

As the new Christian faith left its original harbour of Judaism and spread through the world, naturally pagan people, used to the pantheon of many, many gods, were inclined to think of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit as three gods. So, the doctrine of the Trinity was crucial in saying 'No, we're talking about one God here.'

But it was also designed to stop people thinking of God as a supernatural being, in the way they would think of Zeus or Jupiter. The Trinity was designed to scramble the rational containing mind, by forcing it to hold to what is a rational absurdity - one as three... as one... as three... but really one... and yet at the same time three...

The doctrine of the Trinity made it impossible to think of God as a being... that is, a larger, more powerful, perfected version of us. The Trinity says, 'No, we're exploring a very different reality here!'

You can pray the Trinity... you can meditate on the Trinity... but you'll never pin this God down by an exercise of mere thought and belief. You can be informed by the Trinity... you can be carried to new insight by the Trinity... but at the end of the day, the only option is to bow down before God in worship.

Thomas Merton, the great spiritual guide of the 20th century, had this to say about the doctrine of the Trinity...

"Ultimately we cannot imagine the connection between the two terms of the proposition: 'In God there are Three Persons and One Nature.' And it would be a great mistake to try."

What does Merton really mean when he says it would be a great mistake to try? Perhaps what he is getting at is that in order to truly experience God, we need to let God go; to let God just "Be". Or, to put it another way, and to use the words of Meister Eckhart, the 9th century spiritual guide, "on the journey of faith, in order to grow and mature, you have to get rid of the names and images by which we conceive God."

If you allow a representation of God - even in the construct of your mind - to stand between you and the true reality/glory of God - the way ahead is blocked. While you hold on to that name or image or belief, you'll stay stuck at that level of development. You've got to let all that go, if you're going to travel deeper into the Divine Spirit who is the God of Jesus... who is the Holy Trinity.

What's the upshot of all this, then? If the Holy Trinity is incomprehensible to you... perhaps that's good news!

We are invited this day to re-consider our concept of God - to put away any thoughts of how we may have imagined God in the past. Now is the time to say clearly what God is *not*. So that we might re-imagine instead what God *is*. So, God is not:

- An old man sitting on a remote throne in heaven?
- A punisher who is always watching you, waiting for you to make a mistake?
- An angry father who is forever disappointed with you?
- Someone a bit like Father Christmas... who if you're good will occasionally appear with a present?
- A cosmic vending machine, waiting to answer your requests... if only you can find the right money to put in the slot.

When you think of God, what image comes to mind. In some ways it doesn't matter much what he looks like. Any concept of God as a supernatural being - a being who is a larger, more powerful, perfected version of us - is a major blockage in the growth of faith.

Perhaps it's time to clear all that baggage away. And approach the God of Jesus in awe-filled silence... in meditative prayer... in worship. Perhaps that's what the incomprehensibility of the doctrine of the Trinity is inviting us to.

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty - early in the morning our songs shall rise to thee. Holy, Holy, Holy, merciful and mighty. God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

The Lord be with you.