

Reflection for Trinity Sunday 7th June 2020

Today is Trinity Sunday and, appropriately, there are three short passages chosen from those set by the lectionary. I will introduce each as we come to it.

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Let us listen that we might hear God.

Genesis 1: 1 – 4

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. **Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good;** and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. 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.

Matthew 28:16-20

Now 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.'**

May God bless to us these readings of His Holy Word and to His name be the praise and the glory, evermore. Amen

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As the reef knot champion of the 1st Castle Douglas Scout Troop, 1968 --- -- I have always considered myself to be something of an expert when it comes to **knots**. I pride myself in knowing the difference between a sheepshank and a sheet - bend or a bowline and clove hitch. But this week I have had a rude awakening to the reality of the world of knots and I have discovered that there is a whole other realm of which I was completely ignorant.

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As my thoughts turned towards Trinity Sunday --- which is today --- I dug out of a drawer this little wooden TRIQUETRA --- which is one of the main symbols of the Holy Trinity in Celtic spirituality. The symbol has three points and each point is inextricably connected to the other two by the interwoven strands of the whole. It's a beautiful shape and if you imagine it in three dimensions and not two then it becomes what is known as a TREFOIL KNOT – which is really a simple right over left with the loose ends joined together.

It was there that my trouble started! If you Google TREFOIL KNOT, then you are drawn into a whole new world of MATHEMATICAL KNOT THEORY. Who knew such a thing existed? I read a few paragraphs but quickly withdrew as I felt my head begin to hurt!

There is a story told of the leader of a Priory who always ensured that someone else was on the rota to preach the sermon on Trinity Sunday. This was because there was an expectation that the preacher would seek to cast light upon the complexities of the theology of the Holy Trinity. GOD IS ONE --- the Christian faith resolutely affirms --- yet with equal insistence it declares that GOD IS THREE PERSONS – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How can that be – you ask. Well so do most folk and the Prior in question wasn't going to embarrass himself in front of his fellow monks by showing that he had no more idea than anyone else.

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The trouble is that the theology of the Trinity was worked out in a very different age than that we know today. Then – men and women were – in the main – sure that God was three persons but one God --- but they disagreed about how to explain that. They lived in a world where metaphysical thinking dominated PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY. Their arguments concerning the Holy Trinity were every bit as convoluted and complex as mathematical knot theory. Impenetrable to most people. So, rather than get a headache -- most people just accepted the Holy Trinity as true --- without feeling any desire to explain its possibility. The sanctuary of “holy mystery” came into its own. Others abandoned Trinitarianism for Unitarianism; a division which remains to this day.

Over the years I have gone from a passive acceptance of the mysteries of the Holy Trinity as I grew up in the Church--- through a time as a theology student when I wrestled to understand and endorse the complex attempts that have been made to explain the Holy Trinity. I confess freely that as I moved into parish ministry and the responsibilities of preaching and teaching— there were many times when I wondered if I was really a Unitarian. Eventually, I came to the place where I now am --- which I guess I would describe as an active acceptance of the mysteries of the Holy Trinity.

At a basic level --- the idea that GOD IS THREE IN ONE accords with my own experience ---- --- that is how I find that God relates to me --- through his revelation centred upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. I don't feel any need to explain it either metaphysically or scientifically – indeed the whole idea of trying to do seems silly.

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Secondly --- I have found that in my “active acceptance” – for which phrase you might easily substitute the word faith – as I have lived that acceptance --- so I have found that the mysteries of the Holy Trinity both deepen and open at the same time. And it is there that the Celtic Triquetra comes into its own. Within it – there is no beginning and no end and within it there is a perpetual flow of movement. The three points of prominence stand out individually --- yet they are so much the same that they become indistinguishable. And the three are undoubtedly one --- united in a way which means it is impossible to say where one stops, and another starts.

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In the Triquetra – there is unity --- there is relationship --- and there is unceasing movement. Deeply and mysteriously – yet at the same time simply and clearly --- there is – here --- something of the truth of God. How important --- how essential it is that we hold to that truth in the times we face both as Church and World.

As we continue to live through the challenges and demands of Covid 19 – many of us wonder whether the world will ever be the same again --- and most of us – so far as I can see ---- hope that in key ways that it will not. God – who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit --says to us that authentic and eternal life – looks like this. Unity – Relationship – Movement and God – through Jesus Christ – invites us to enter into that authentic and eternal life – by joining first in relationship with God --- through which relationship we are joined authentically and eternally to one another. We cannot and will not achieve these things on our own --- but with God and in God they already are – and ever will be.

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In closing let me go back to near the beginning of this reflection --- when I spoke of the attempts by the early Church to explain the holy Trinity in metaphysical terms. What is metaphysics? Well the dictionary says it is the branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things. It's perfectly understandable that when confronted with a mystery we try to go back to first principles --- it's the tried and tested way to address a problem. But what are the first principles when dealing with God? In my experience – I have learned from Jesus Christ --- that the first principle that is important is not to be found in the realm of metaphysics --- but in what the theologians call METANOIA --- and what you and I would know as repentance or spiritual conversion. --- when Jesus Christ brought me to my knees in repentance for my belief that I could do it by myself – and I discovered the truth of God when he turned my life around so that God is the centre and not me.

I believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen