

Trinity Sunday

THE HOLY TRINITY

INVOCATION

+ In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

From the rising of the sun to its setting
great is the name of the Lord!

The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.
We rejoice and give him the glory!

PRAISE

You are worthy, our Lord and God
to receive glory and honour and power.

O God, Father,
moment by moment you hold me in being:
on you I depend.

O God, Son,
friend and brother beside me:
in you I trust.

O God, Holy Spirit,
life and love within me:
from you I live

Come, holy, blessed and glorious Trinity;
send forth your light and your truth,
let these be my guide;
let them bring me to you holy mountain,
to the place where you dwell.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

When Isaiah beheld the Lord in glory, he exclaimed:

‘Woe is me! I am doomed. I am a man of unclean lips,
and I dwell among a people of unclean lips.’

*But one of the seraphim took a coal from the fire and touched his lips,
saying:*

‘This has touched your lips;
now your iniquity is removed
and your sin is wiped out.’

(Cf. Isaiah 6.1–7)

We, too, come before God asking him to cleanse our lips, to take away our iniquity and forgive our sins. So, we take a few moments to reflect on your life in the last few days, and in your own words speak to God about it, asking him to amend what is wrong, and to affirm what is good.

Then say:

Almighty Father, you come to meet us when we turn to you:
Father, have mercy.

Eternal Son, you died on the cross for our sins:
Christ, have mercy.

Holy Spirit, you give us life and peace:
Lord, have mercy.

Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Holy God,
faithful and unchanging:
enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,
and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love,
that we may truly worship you;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS

Read: ISAIAH 40.12-26

These are the words of Isaiah of Babylon who wrote the second part of the Book of Isaiah (chs. 40-55). He lived about 200 years after Isaiah of Jerusalem who had the vision in the Temple referred to above. He was one of those exiled to Babylon, an experience that had a profound affect on his understanding of God. He saw God clearly as the only God, the creator of all, a majestic vision poetically described in this reading.

PSALM 8

O Lord, our God, how majestic
is your name through all the earth!

Your majesty is set above the heavens.
From the mouths of children and of babes
you fashioned praise to foil your enemy,
to silence the foe and the rebel.

When I see the heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you arranged,
what is man that you should keep him in mind,
the son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him little lower than the angels;
with glory and honour you crowned him,
gave him power over the works of your hands:
you put all things under his feet,

All of them, sheep and oxen,
yes, even the cattle of the fields,
birds of the air, and fish of the sea
that make their way through the waters.

O Lord, our God, how majestic
is your name through all the earth!

ALLELUIA

Alleluia, alleluia!
Glory be to God,
beyond, beside and within,
who was, and is, and is to come!
Alleluia!

Read: MATTHEW 28.16-20

REFLECTION : *Believing in the Trinity*

The other day I had a call from my friend Paula; she's having her daughter Eleanor christened. Our conversation went something like this.

Hi! Peter.

Hello Paula. How are you?

I'm fine. Look, we're having Ellie christened next month, and I wanted to talk to you about it.

Sure. Go ahead.

Well - I've been looking through the service, and I've got to say I believe in the Holy Trinity. Of course, I could just say the words, but really I'm not sure what they mean. Why do we have all this stuff about the Trinity?

Because that's what God is like.

But how do we know? No-one's ever seen God.

True, but we have experienced his presence, and that tells us what he's like.

How?

Think of someone close to you know – think of Eleanor. What's she like.

Oh! She's adorable. She's got lovely fair hair, the cutest smile – everyone thinks she takes after Simon. She's grown a lot since you last saw her, and she's just beginning to crawl. She's everywhere!

I bet she is! So one way you experience her is through how she appears and what she does. Right?

Yeah.

What about her character? I guess she's already a little person, with a mind of her own?

You can say that again! It's extraordinary – she's so young, but already she has her own personality - very strong willed – Lord knows where she gets that from!

So that's another way you experience her, as she is in herself – her own person, unique and a bit unknown.

Yes.

And how has she affected you and Simon? She must have made a big difference to your lives.

Absolutely! Everything's different.

Now we're a family we have a new routine, we're making new friends, doing new things. The house is full of all the stuff we've had to get. And her arrival has brought us together in a new way, and made us think about our own lives too – what we want out of life, what really makes us happy.

So there's a third way in which you experience Ellie – through the effect she has on you and the way she has brought you together.

Yes, absolutely.

Right. So you experience Ellie in three ways: as she is in herself; through the way she expresses herself; and through the effect she has on you.

Yes. That's about it.

Well, Paula, just think about it. These are the three ways we experience anyone. It's how you experience Simon:

You experience him in himself: he's a unique and precious person, with his own gifts and creativity, and with a mystery at his heart that you'll never quite fathom.

You experience him through what he does: Simon is there for you and Ellie, caring and understanding.

And you experience him through the effect he has on you: his love changed your life, and helped you to grow in new ways.

Well, yes; I guess that's right.

And if I asked him about how he experiences you he'd say much the same.

Yes, I guess he would. He often says I'm a mystery, quite beyond him! But he also depends on me as I do on him, and our love has changed him too.

Well, its the same with God. We experience him in the same three ways.

First of all God simply *is*. God's beyond us, unknowable, infinite. Because God exists we exist. Without God there would be nothing: no world, no nature, no Simon, no Paula, no Eleanor.

That reminds me of something I read that described God as 'primordial' – what a wonderful word – so that's what it means. It's all a bit overwhelming, like Isaiah in the Temple, when he had a vision of God, high and lifted up, and the whole place filled with smoke!

Yes, I think Isaiah was overwhelmed, but not simply by what he saw. He heard God speaking to him as well. And that's our second experience of God, through the way he expresses himself, through his Word and his acts – the created world, the way he cares for us, suffers for us, forgives our wrongdoing. He is beside us as our friend; he teaches us how to live.

The primordial, unknowable God making himself known?

Yes, that's right. And finally, God touches and changes our life. He is within us, making it possible for us to relate to him and with each other; he gives us our uniqueness, he inspires us to use our gifts and to grow and develop in new ways.

Does that make sense?

Yes, I think it does. You're saying God is sort of beyond us, beside us and within us, and that's how we experience him.

Yes, exactly. God is beyond us, beside us, and within us. And what the Church has done is to give these experiences names: Father, Son and Spirit.

It can't be that simple?

Well, there's more that could be said, but I think that's the essence of it. The doctrine of the Trinity grew out of experience, not the other way round.

So, God's not some sort of divine committee with three members?

No! And he never has been.

So why does the Church talk about the three 'persons'?

Well, that's part of the problem of translating from one language to another. The Latin word *persona* means an actor's mask, or role. In classical theatre, actors wore masks so that the audience would know which character they portrayed – their *persona*.

Oh yes! We did a Greek play, when I was at school, and we all wore masks.

Yes, the mask showed your *persona*, your character. In the second century a theologian called Tertullian used the term *persona* to describe our different experiences of God. And today we use the term 'persona' to describe a role or character that someone has assumed or put on – the way we experience them.

Yes – its like I say about Simon: there's Simon the solicitor, Simon the dare devil and Simon the romantic.

That's right. The three 'persona' of Simon. The problem comes when *persona* is translated into English as 'person'. We naturally think of three people, but we should be thinking of three characters or symbols, three aspects of one being.

I see. But where does Jesus fit in? Doesn't the Church refer to him as the second person of the Trinity?

Yes it does, because Jesus is the one who expresses what God is like. But Jesus is more than just one *persona* of God. As St Paul said, he is the image of the invisible God, all three *personae*: 'it is in Christ

that the Godhead in all its fullness dwells embodied.' (Col 2.9) Jesus is 'the radiance of God's glory,' as it says in Hebrews, 'the stamp of God's very being' (Heb 1.3) – beyond, beside, within. Jesus is the human face of God. Bishop John Baker put it this way: if the eternal, infinite God is expressed in human form, Jesus is what you get.

Hey, I hadn't thought of Jesus like that before; that's really helpful!

Well, it makes a lot of sense to me.

We see in Jesus a reflection of the whole of the Trinity, all three *personae*. His miracles – healing the sick, calming the storm – point to the mystery of God, around us and beyond us. His teaching, his suffering and his death, show God beside us, our friend and saviour. And the way he transforms people's lives, putting us in touch with our true selves, helping us to relate to God and to each other, show God the inspirer, working within us.

OK. I feel happier now about saying that I believe in the Trinity – I won't just be saying the words – but what difference does it make?

Well, Paula, get God right and all else falls into place.

The three ways we experience God are three experiences of love. Think again of your family. Your love surrounds and enfolds you; it reaches out in care and concern; and it brings out the best in you. These are the three ways God loves us. Love is the source of our life; and God is love, the One 'in whom we live and move and have our being,' as St Paul put it (Acts 17.28).

'The one in whom we live and move and have our being.' That's a beautiful description of God.

It is, isn't it? It expresses both the otherness of God and also his closeness. And if love is the essence of God himself, then it must also be our supreme value – both in our private lives and in our public lives. And, of course, 'love' in the Christian sense means self-giving, even self-sacrifice.

Well, I can see how self-giving fits into our private lives, but how does it fit into public life – or into business life?

Well, Bishop Simon Phipps said that in business and public life that means taking everyone's interests seriously.

That's a challenge! Everyone seems to be out for themselves these days. And 'Taking everyone's interests seriously' must include how we care for the earth

Absolutely. Its all become me, me, me. Without love, relationships become mean and inward looking and morals become self-centered. Taking everyone's interests seriously, points us away from ourselves towards the needs of others, especially those who are poor and vulnerable.

So it all comes from the Trinity – love, relationships, faith, generosity.

Exactly. Getting your picture of God right is the first step towards seeing things clearly.

We've come a long way from baptism, but it connects up. When Ellie is baptised you will be recognising that she – and all of us – are part of the communion of love of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: God beyond, God beside, God within.

Its all summed-up in a prayer I came across a few years ago - you might like to teach it to Ellie when she's a bit older:

O God, Father,
moment by moment you hold me in being,
on you I depend.

O God eternal Son,
friend and brother beside me,
in you I trust.

O God, Holy Spirit,
life and love within me,
from you I live.

Pause and reflect.

PRAISE

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes;
most blesséd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, your great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains high soaring above,
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small,
in all life thou livest, the true life of all:
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish: but naught changest thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thins angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all laud we would render, O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

PRAYERS

A time of free prayer and intercession. You may like to use the traditional five-fold pattern:

For the Church

For the World

For family, friends, neighbours and the local community

For the sick and all in need, near and far

For those who have died

At the end:

Merciful Father,
accept my prayers,
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

CONCLUSION

Our Father...

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and for ever.
Amen.