

Sermon Trinity Sunday Year B 2024

A not-infrequent question that is often asked by those who encounter liturgical worship either from a non-Christian or non-liturgical Christian background is, *why do we do what we do?* Why do you perform certain ceremonies and actions? Why do you wear certain clothes? Why do you perform certain ritual acts? Why is the church year structured in a certain way? These are all valid and important questions. They all deserve to be addressed. I remind you all once more that we shouldn't presume that people who visit us or who come to us from another tradition know any of this. We should not take anything that we do here for granted! The last question, however – *why is the church's year structured in a certain way?* – has particular resonance for the great feast we celebrate today: the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

We come now to the end of the key cycle in the church's year. That cycle began in mid-February this year with Lent, then six weeks that led to the commemoration of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. The mysteries of Easter were then explored in depth over seven weeks culminating in our celebration last Sunday with the feast of Pentecost. Repetition is the mother of memory. And so each year *we immerse ourselves* in the central stories of our faith and the central mysteries of faith so that we continue to be *familiar with them*, and continue to be *formed by them*.

It is this cycle, this progression, we have been journeying through for the last four months that *leads us* to our commemoration today. But in fact, it also draws in what we celebrated *last year*, and our celebration of Christmas! Effectively, then, a full half of the year in what we have been recalling, celebrating, and remembering these past six months points to and directs us to this feast today. And today is, if you like, the 'springboard' for *the rest* of the year. The weeks after today – until we start a new year again in Advent - will be known as the 'Sundays after Trinity.' Our entire liturgical year, I hope you can see, *gravitates* around the Mystery we recall today.

Well, how so? You may ask. *How does this all relate? How does our yearly observance of Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost all lead us to this point today?* Why is it that our church's year appears to flow to it and from it? In short, the very way we live out our shared Christian life directs us to the Mystery at the heart of our faith: the Holy Trinity. The Trinity, the defining belief of Christians. The Trinity, around which our whole life is to be oriented.

The very content of our faith that we have been recalling these past months reveals to us the very God we confess. Christ in his birth, life, passion, death, and resurrection, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit reveals to us the very face of God. All these lead us to our celebration today. Because it is the sustained and careful reflection of the person and work of Jesus as contained in the scriptures and witnessed to in the church that has led to the definitive pronouncement: that we believe in One God in three Persons, Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity.

Now our natural tendency might be to nervously step back from the mystery of what we celebrate today. Perhaps we think it is all too abstract and complex and so best to say nothing at all. But while we are rightly humble before the Mystery, silence, in fact, is not the correct response. Something can be said about the Triune God because God himself has said something about it. The central platform of Christian faith is that God is not content to remain strange and unknown. The central witness of the Scriptures is that God seeks Communion with us. The central conviction upon which the entire scriptural record depends is that God has shown himself, that God reveals himself.

A key insight in the Christian understanding of the Trinitarian God is that the way God is in his own life - that is, the way God exists in himself - is *the same way* that God reveals himself through salvation history. God, as a Communion of Persons, equal in dignity and glory, is exactly the God that has been revealed to us. There is not God who exists one way in his eternity, but has revealed himself in a different way to humankind. We can be confident that to know and understand God is simply to discern his presence and action through the story of salvation.

It is this same conviction that lay behind the reading today from Deuteronomy: God acts through history, we can discern his fingerprint, he can be known, he speaks to us, and shows himself to us. The reading today ends, *keep all his statues and commandments...that it may go well with you, and with your children after you*. The point being that we should listen to and obey God because God is the only one worthy of our devotion. God is worthy of our devotion, to be listened to and obeyed, precisely because he has shown himself as God the creator, the holy God, the true God. The People of God can have confidence in these claims because of the way he has *shown himself*: in the burning bush, on Mt Sinai, as the one who saves and delivers his people. The writer of Deuteronomy reminds us that Israel was witness to these deeds, that they might know that the Lord is God; that there is no other beside him.

God takes the initiative to show us what God is like. And as Christians, this definitive act of self-disclosure occurs in the person of Jesus Christ. We might hesitate at the Mystery, but God *steps up* to reassure us. It is this very idea that is reflected in the gospel today. The disciples, after the resurrection of the Lord, gathered upon the mountain to which the Lord had appointed. And, we are told, some worshipped and others doubted (a perfect summary of the variety of the responses to the Lord Christ, even to this day!). And we are told the Lord Christ came to them. He stepped before them. He comes, and before both worship and doubt, he appears. *He steps forward*. Again, he takes the initiative. And this one sentence encapsulates the entire mystery of the Incarnation, and indeed the whole truth of the mystery we celebrate today: *God shows himself to us*. We can know what God is like because God has taken the definitive step toward us. And it is the sustained and careful reflection of this revelation that the church understands as Trinity. We come to that conclusion, we make that bold, unique assertion, simply from the evidence God has been showing us.

Our liturgical year is not just different ideas and different stories patched together. There is a glorious unity. And this reflects the glorious unity evident in the gospel accounts themselves. A unity that reminds us that there is *one saving act of God* in Christ. When we can see that one work – Jesus in his birth, life, death, and resurrection – we see God revealed. Jesus says in the Gospel today, *‘all authority in heaven and on earth is given to me’*. This is Jesus the exalted one, the ruler and judge of all. It is the climax of the gospel, the culmination of all that the story in Matthew’s gospel has been leading up to. But this story also ends as it began: *‘I am with you always, to the end of the age’*. Remember, how at the start of the Gospel we are told the child would be called *Immanuel*, ‘God-with-us’. The promise is the same. *God is with us. God is with us to the end of the Age*. God - beyond all words and images, the creator of the world, the holy one of Israel - has stepped before us, is present to us forever.

My brothers and sisters, faith in the Trinity is not a problem to be solved, or a mathematical equation to be answered, much less a mystery to be avoided. It is the distinct mark of faith of those who trust in what God has shown of himself. Listening to his voice and recognizing his action in the world leads us to see that God is Trinity. We can have confidence that the God who has revealed himself is the one God we love and serve. As he has shown himself, then, rightly is he the centre of our worship and of our life. Amen.