

On Trinity Sunday we are not celebrating a new truth, something else beyond Pentecost, but rather the realisation of the rhythm of mutual relations within the very being of the one God: a to and fro, give and take, a sense of love poured out and love received.

The Trinity is not an abstract theory but where we live – and also how we should live as Christians. It is powerful and relevant to our witness, ministry and mission. It helps us in time of need and binds us together in love; it demonstrates how we can be bound together in mutual love, and sends us out on a mission to live, work, play, sleep, eat and, yes, rest to the praise and glory of God almighty.

In our first reading, St Paul recounts aspects of the divine encounter with the Almighty God: we are reminded of the grace of the Almighty God expressed through Jesus Christ who is God the Son; we are guided to the Almighty's amazing love expressed through God the Father; and we are directed to the heavenly fellowship expressed and experienced through God the Holy Spirit. Our second reading highlights the presence of the three persons of the Godhead during one's beginning of the Christian journey – and this is a commendation by Jesus himself.

The doctrine of the Trinity is central to biblical Christianity. It describes the relationship among the three members of the Godhead in a manner consistent with the Scriptures. Key to this doctrine is the question of how God can be both one and three. The early Christians did not want to lose their Jewish monotheism while exalting their Saviour. Christians argued that O.T. Jewish monotheism did not exclude the Trinity. The Bible teaches that Almighty God expressed himself in three persons as Father, Son and Spirit. They are of the same essence but can and do, at times, perform different roles. For example, it was not the Father or the Spirit that was crucified but the Son; it was not the Son that was sent on the disciples on the day of Pentecost but the Spirit.

Heresies emerged as people sought to explain the Christian God without becoming tritheist. The climax of the Trinitarian formulation occurred at the Council of Constantinople in 381. This does not imply that the council invented the doctrine but rather, in response to heresies prevalent at the time, it explained what the Scriptures already assumed.

The apostolic teaching clearly accepted the full and real deity of Jesus and the Spirit and accepted and adopted the Trinitarian baptismal formula which Jesus gave to his disciples before his ascension. In numerous of his letters Paul casually attributed godly qualities to Jesus and the Holy Spirit, while at the same time highlighting the relationship among the three persons of the Godhead. He writes about God's grace (2Cor 1:12) and the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (2Cor 8:9) and being obedient to the Spirit. For example, when signing off one of his letters – which is part of our first reading today, Paul wrote: 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all' (2Cor 13:14).

As St. Paul wrestled with the idea of God's grace, he realised that the grace of Jesus Christ was the motive for his work. This knowledge helped him to live his life by the love of God, in good

times and bad, and celebrate the Holy Spirit through whom he and his diverse, often difficult congregations learn to see Christ in one another. So when he wrote to this divided and bickering church, Paul wished that they would

- 1 Love the world as God, the creator loves it
- 2 Give themselves entirely to God's will for the world, as God the Son did.
- 3 Find their real identity in belonging together and together serving God, in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Peter also stressed the relational attributes of the persons of the Trinity when he stated that we have been '*... chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ (1Peter 1:2).*

Increased persecution and heresy forced Christian writers to state more precisely and to defend the biblical teaching of the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Some, like Justin Martyr highlighted the fact that Jesus was distinct in function from the Father. Some such as Athenagoras, highlighted that Jesus was without beginning; Theophilus reminded us that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Son; Origen re-emphasised that the Holy Spirit is coeternal with the Father and the Son and Tertullian stressed that the Godhead is three in persons (number) but one in substance.

These aspects are contained in our statement of belief – (the creed) that we regularly reaffirm in our public worship. The Trinity is about our belief in Almighty God the author of life and relationship who loved us into being and sustains us through His Spirit; it is about our belief in the God who is one, yet creates space for others to flourish, knowing that it is in complementarity that we can fulfil our potential in him. We can do this if we allow the Spirit to lead us in all things – not just in what we consider to be 'appropriate' or essential. Nicodemus made that mistake. He wanted to compartmentalise his life and somewhat rationalise God's expression of love.

But we can't successfully do that so we need to accept God's unconventional and extremely costly demonstration of his love for each one of us and remember that no matter how 'unloving' or 'undeserving' you may feel God in Christ says you are worth loving and therefore deserve to be loved.

May the God of love, through the power of the Spirit enable us to show each other the kind of love he has demonstrated to each one of us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.