

The Most Holy Trinity

We have just celebrated the season of the Resurrection, coming to its culmination last Sunday, Pentecost Sunday, with Luke's dramatisation of Jesus' gift to us of the Holy Spirit, his love bond with his Father. Today we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. We come together to reflect on our experience of God. As Christians, our reflections upon God focus on Jesus.

Jesus addressed God as 'Abba!' – an affectionate way of speaking to a father within the family. The image comes to mind of a child running to its dad with open arms, expecting to be cuddled and consoled. It is especially significant that Jesus continued to relate to God in this way even in the isolation of his agony and death.

If God is the Father of Jesus, then God is the Father of us all. When Jesus was baptised in the Jordan, his understanding of God as his Abba was confirmed by an overwhelming experience of being God's Son in whom the heart of God delighted. It is this same experience that was offered us in our baptism. God said to each one of us: 'You are my son/daughter. I love you. My soul delights in you'. We share Jesus' faith as we say: 'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty'. I have no need to remind you that 'Father' is an image - a very sacred one because one that was dear to Jesus, but an image all the same. We could just as easily say 'Mother'. The Catholic Catechism reminds us (n. 239): 'God's parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood'. Any image that is experienced by us as nurturing and life-giving is a proper image for God. And we must recognise as wrong any image of God that does not fit with being our loving Creator who delights in us.

Jesus' life was like ours in everything except sin. He had to cope with being part of a people who were not at home in their own land but had to suffer occupation from Rome. He suffered from the anti-Galilean prejudice of Judaea and Jerusalem. He knew the fickleness of the crowd and betrayal by friends. It is only a few weeks since we journeyed with him through his Passion and Death on the Cross. Throughout his life, Jesus experienced God's Spirit in the depths of his heart, inspiring him, guiding him, leading him into the desert and into Galilee, encouraging him. Throughout his life Jesus dared to stay in touch with the one he called 'Father', and when he was unable to experience the love he kept believing in it. Luke speaks of the joy that Jesus' communion with God gave him: 'Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You have hidden these things from those who fancy themselves wise, and you have revealed them to infants. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him'(Luke 10:21-22, slightly adapted).

God was continually pouring the Spirit of his love into the Heart of Jesus. This Spirit focused his mind and heart to discern in all the different circumstances of his life, the presence and action of God. He kept looking, even on the cross, for the grace, the gift and the will of God. He saw everything as a word of God to him. His parables are full of references to nature, which continually spoke to him of God. And we see the lovely, sacred respect, which he showed to everyone, for he saw in every person and in every event the glory of God's presence, and his heart was attuned to listen for God's word to him. It was this love that held Jesus to his Father through the darkest moments of his life, and it was this Spirit of love that Jesus entrusted to his Father in his dying moments. It was this same Spirit of love that Jesus' poured out over his

disciples at Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, and which we experience in prayer, in our mutual giving and receiving of love, and in the myriad of ways in which the Spirit of God renews the heart and face of the earth.

The closer we draw to our own heart and to heart of others, the more we allow ourselves to be moved by the Spirit of God, the closer we draw to God, but God remains mysterious to us, beyond our grasp and our comprehension. We are simply too small to comprehend the source of all creation and of all life, for it is God who holds everything in existence, ourselves included. But God does communicate with us, through his Spirit of love moving in the depths of our hearts as well as through creation, a silent but wondrous word to us from our creator. It was Jesus who taught us that if we wish to be in communion with God we must not try to escape from the world. Rather, we must, like Jesus, continue to penetrate to its heart, its deepest meaning, for, as Teilhard de Chardin says: God is the heart and the beyond of everything. The transcendent ('beyond') God is at the heart of everything ('immanent'). God speaks to us through the lives and the words of wonderful people like Moses, or Buddha or Mohammed. Limited words, broken words, imperfect words, but words from God nonetheless. And then there is Jesus, God's perfect human word, revealing through his words and his attitudes and his actions who God really is and how we, as human beings, are to respond to God. Jesus is, as we have learned to say, God's Word made flesh.

Our first contact with God is through God's Spirit of love, coming to us through our parents and through all those who show by their manner that we are a gift that makes their soul delight. This mysterious Spirit of love draws us to Jesus, who becomes God's word of love to us. The Spirit, moving mysteriously in the depths of our hearts, reveals to us the heart of Jesus as we reflect on Jesus' life and allow his words to form our minds and attitudes, and inspire our actions. And Jesus tells us of the Father and walks with us towards the mysterious source and goal of our very existence.

When we think 'God', we learn to think 'Spirit', 'Jesus' and 'Father'. The experience of love points us to Jesus, the great Lover, and so to Love itself, the One who is the heart and the beyond of everything. And where do we find this Blessed Trinity of Love? We find this God wherever we find beauty, truth and love. But if at times, like Jesus, our world seems to lack this and we are plunged into a terrible darkness, Jesus assures us that this Spirit, this Word, this Father is dwelling in the depths of our own being. John of the Cross expresses it well: 'You long to know where you may find the One you love, so as to be united with him. God dwells within you. You are yourself the tabernacle, his secret hiding place. Rejoice, exult, for all you could possibly desire, all your heart's longing is so close, so intimate as to be within you; you cannot *be* without him'(Spiritual Canticle 1,7).

Forty years ago I began my ministry as chaplain at the University of NSW. One day the gardener popped in to my office and asked me to explain the Trinity to him. Fortunately I had enough sense to pause and to ask him first how he saw it. In a way that nicely avoided abstraction, he went straight to the heart of the mystery by speaking of the Trinity in terms of Dance. He saw the Father as the Dance, the Son as the Dancer and the Spirit as the Dancing. We come to know and see the Dance when we come to know and watch the Dancer. We experience the Dance when we are drawn by the Dancer into the Dancing. One could speak of God as Life, of Jesus as the one who lived this life and of the Spirit as the experience of living. Perhaps best of all one

can speak of God as Love, of Jesus as the Lover who incarnates this love, and of the Spirit as the experience of Loving that we enjoy because of Jesus.

We have been reflecting on how we experience God. The Feast of the Trinity, however, says more than that. It expresses an astonishing insight into the very being of God himself. We cannot expect to be able to grasp God's being with our tiny minds, but, thanks to Jesus, we are sure that God is such as to be able to be experienced by us in the way we have described.

God is not an almighty isolated being. We say that God is love. We know that when we experience love we long to be fully united with the one we love. With us, the union is always imperfect - there are always barriers to full communion. The God whom we experience as Father, Son, and Spirit is One through perfect unity in love.

Knowing that God is Spirit reminds us to be attentive to the divinely inspired movements of our own heart: movements of longing as we yearn for closer communion with him whose Spirit inspires us; movements of wonder and praise as we rejoice in his being with us. It reminds us to protect the space that we make for prayer. It reminds us to be sensitive to these movements in every man and every woman.

Knowing that God is Word reminds us to be attentive to the words and actions through which God speaks to us, and the words and actions through which we respond to him. We learn, too, to reverence the sacred ground of each person's Spirit, and be attentive to each person's word, as together we journey towards him who is the Father of all.

Knowing that God is Father reminds us to pray, in the words of today's responsorial psalm: 'May your love be upon us, O Lord, as we place all our hope in you'(Psalm 33:22).