

**Scripture: Isa 6:1-8, Psalm 29, Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-17**

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

“By the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity.”

Trinity Sunday – the day when we celebrate the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons in one God. It is a difficult day for preachers because we have to talk about God. You may think that preachers are always talking about God, but in my experience most preachers actually talk very little about God. They talk a lot about what God wants of us or what God has done for us and is doing for us. After all, that is the Gospel. But they do not talk very much about who God is.

Talking about God, not just referring to God, but actually trying to say who God is, is one of those times where language fails us. You may know the experience of wanting to say something really significant, to tell someone how important they are to you, or to tell someone how deeply sorry you are, and the usual phrases come nowhere near what you really want to say. The only words you can find are terribly makeshift, but on the other hand you must use them. Not to say anything would be even worse. You must say what you can and hope the words point to what you cannot really say.

We have to talk about God. But we live in a society which has largely forgotten what the word ‘God’ means. People think God is some fairytale figure in the sky. We cannot depend on the word ‘God’ meaning for most people anything remotely like the God we know in Jesus Christ. We must talk about who God is. At the same time, we know that words cannot sum God up or pin God down. All we can do is use words which point to what cannot be said. It is important, when we talk about God, to realize that God is infinitely more than can be put into words.

There are several Christian ways of trying to say who God is. The one that says the most about God is the one we use in the creeds, when we say we believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God is those Three, and the Three are One God. But if that says the most about God, it is also the most difficult thing Christians say about God. So instead of going straight to the Trinity, I shall first talk about two other ways in which Christians try to say who God is. Hopefully, this will help us to see what the Trinity means.

So, ‘God is love’ is only going to mean something if we can spell out what God’s love means. And this brings us to the second way of talking about God. This is talking about God by telling the story of God’s love for the world. That is the way the Bible spells out what it means to say that God is love. It tells us how God created the world out of love, and the story of how God continued to love the world He created and got involved with it in His love for us. It tells how even when we rejected God’s love and spoiled God’s world with evil, God still went on loving us and did all He could to rescue us from evil and win our love for Him. That is our Old Testament story of God’s involvement with the people of Israel. It is the story that comes to a climax with Jesus, when God in His love for us sent His Son to actually be one of us, to live a human life with us and to die for us. It is the story that continues with God’s loving presence in the Holy Spirit, in the church, and in our lives. The story of God’s love for the world goes on and we are a part of it.

The story tells us who God is because we see what kind of love God is. God is self-giving love. He does not just sit up in heaven and wish us well. He gets involved with us in His love for us. God shows His love for us in the costly self-sacrifice of Jesus' suffering and death for us. He gives Himself for us when He gives us His Holy Spirit as the gift of Himself present with us in our lives. 'God is love' means that God gives Himself for us and to us. That is God's nature.

But there is something else to notice about that story of God's love for the world. When we see God's love in action, we see not only God the Father who cares for us like a parent for his children. We also see God the Son, who loves us by coming alongside us as Jesus, as our human brother, one of us, living and dying for us. And, we also see God the Holy Spirit, who comes into our very being, who loves us, as it were, from the inside. God the Father cares for us, natures us, watches over us, and directs us in His love. God Son is God in loving solidarity with us, God as Jesus, with us in our human world, giving for us in His human life and death. And God the Holy Spirit is God's love in the depths of our being, sharing God's love with us so that we can love with God's love. It is only because God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that God can love us in the way He does. Only because God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that God can be caring, self-sacrificial and self-giving love.

So, we really need all three ways of talking about God. We need to say that God is love. We need to tell the story of God's love for the world and what God's love is in practice. Then we also need to say, God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is another way of saying that God is love, another way of telling the story of God's love. God loves us as the Father, as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. So, when we find the doctrine of the Trinity difficult and puzzling, we should also ask ourselves, how could we tell the story otherwise?

However, we need to take one further step. I have been talking about God's love for us. But if God is love, God's love must be more than His love for us. God is love in His very being, quite apart from us. Even before we existed, even before God created the world, God was love in His own being. God's love for us is the overflowing of the love that God is eternally. And that is so because God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's being is the love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

An illustration might help. Think of a very loving family, one in which people are devoted to each other. But, not the sort of family whose love is a closed circle, excluding other people. This is the sort of family that is always befriending other people, just like you sisters do here at the convent. The family's love is constantly being shared with others. Other people are welcomed into the home and made to feel like they are a part of the family.

This only happens when there is real love within the family. There has to be love between the members of the family so that they can share that love with others and open their loving relationships to embrace others. Others feel welcomed because there is a loving family there already. It is a little like that with God. When God sends His Son into the world to befriend us and when God send His Spirit into our hearts, God is opening up His own life of love for us to share in. It is like being welcomed into the family.

The doctrine of the Trinity is what we must understand if we are to really grasp that truth of the Gospel. That God Himself in His love has really come into our world as Jesus Christ and that God Himself in His love has really come into our own experience as the Holy Spirit.

However, we must not think that in the mere formula of the Trinity, we have got God within the grasp of our minds, as though we now actually understand God. The doctrine of the Trinity takes us into the mystery of who God is, but it does not explain or dispel the mystery. When we know God as Trinity we truly know God, but we by no means understand God.

God the Trinity is the love we find in Jesus Christ and experience in the Holy Spirit. God the Trinity is the mystery of love we can experience but never understand.

Amen