

Trinity Sunday

One of the things we often hear in times of crisis, such as the one from which we hope we're now emerging, is that everyone 'pulled together': I assume that's a rowing analogy, about which I know less than nothing. But if so, it is a good one: from looking at recreated ancient triremes to the modern Boat Race it is immediately evident that rowing requires an unusual level of teamwork which transcends the mechanical and becomes instinctive, so that the rowers make a uniquely unified force.

All that talk about us pulling together can lead to silly and exaggerated comparisons (lately with the spirit of the Blitz) and it is only partly true, but we are rightly encouraged and even amazed whenever people can set aside supposed differences, or at least work together for the common good. I've certainly seen evidence of that around me here in W1 and in this community. Sometimes this experience of working together has a long-lasting benefit in breaking down boundaries; at other times, sadly, old divisions, prejudices and suspicions return when the crisis is past. Clearly the first outcome is our aspiration.

Trinity Sunday celebrates that, whether we are in crisis or not, in season or out of season, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit *always* pull together to love and save us: they can't help themselves; their unity is as constitutive of who God is as their persons are distinct. What we glimpse as the best attribute of our family, nation or church community defines who God is for Christians: how the persons who are the one eternal God see, judge and act towards the world.

You'll know Rublev's famous icon of the Trinity, depicting the story from Genesis 18 of three angelic visitors to Abraham and Sarah in Mamre, seated and receiving hospitality from their hosts. It is taken to be a foreshowing of the Trinity because the description of the three visitors alternates between plural and singular pronouns and the event is clearly understood as a visit from God. And, as is often noted, there's a fourth, empty, place at the table, closest to the viewer, inviting us to join them. It is a profound theological image, but we shouldn't misunderstand that fourth place.

This is not a post-enlightenment protestant invitation to me, an individual. That seat at the table is reserved for all of humanity, a catholic invitation to all to join in the very life of God, to pull together with the three persons in their relationship of perfect love, to love and save the world. The icon proclaims the openness of the invitation rather than the singularity of it.

That means one cannot profess faith in the Trinity and also conspire with things that pull the human family apart. It is scandalous to hold to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and also to be known as a bigot, a racist, sexist; or not to care about refugees or those who die each day of starvation or on death row. We can't solve all those things, we mustn't pointlessly virtue-signal our guilt about them (which is worse than not caring); but we may neither ignore them nor be complacent about them. We cannot keep signing our bodies in the name of the triune God and then collude with the exploitation of others' bodies. You get the point.

Trinity Sunday is not about theological mathematics, working out how three goes into one. That leads to a logical incoherence that always ends badly for faith. But neither is

it a bolt-on doctrine that we subscribe to without further thought. It is a celebration of the life of God – what could be more wonderful than that – and about gaining strength and maturity, here at the Eucharist, so that we all pull together to try and ensure that all God’s children have the opportunity to hear the Good News of how much God loves them, us, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Most people learn about the saving love of God through the way they observe *us* seeing, judging and acting. Our participation in the Mass and our devotional life bear fruit if they form us into relationships of love grounded in the Trinity.

As often, for me, this is best expressed by Austin Farrer:

The disciples who were present at the Supper saw and heard Jesus making eucharist to the Father over the bread and the cup. They were faithful witnesses of the intercourse between the Eternal Son and his Eternal Father. Mortal ears and eyes at that moment perceived the movement of speech and love which passes in the heart of the Godhead; human minds entered into that converse of the Divine Persons which is the life and happiness of the Blessed Trinity. Belief in the Trinity is not a distant speculation; the Trinity is that blessed family into which we are adopted. God has asked us into his house, he has spread his table before us, he has set out bread and wine. We are made one body with the Son of God, and in him converse with the eternal Father, through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

With his usual clarity and concision Farrer illustrates how Eucharistic theology and Trinitarian theology meet, to make a crucial connection in Christian life. That connection is made for us first in our baptism, just as the Trinity is revealed in the gospel accounts of the baptism of the Lord; it is then nourished at Mass and in the other sacraments of the Church.

It is not by accident that in Catholic tradition we most often invoke the Trinity as we sign our bodies with the cross. Every time we do that, we re-commit ourselves to die to self, so that God’s saving love may be realised for everyone, everywhere.

Let us profess that belief now as we enact our proclamation on our very selves, our souls and bodies, offered in the chalice at this altar:

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