

2019 HOLY TRINITY

Back in 1970 ‘Godspell’, the musical, came out. For many years it was immensely popular. The words of perhaps its most enduring song were not actually composed by Broadway but were taken from a prayer written by St Richard Chichester, a 13th Century English Saint. Let it be our prayer as we begin this reflection on the Holy Trinity: “Dear God three things I pray. To see Thee more clearly. To love Thee more dearly. To follow Thee more nearly. Day by day. Amen.”

To see God more clearly is not just a life-long task. It is a task which will engross us throughout eternity; such is the immensity of God.

The Doctrine of the Trinity is all about the mystery of God. Down the centuries people have come up with all sorts of ideas and images of God. Some have been quite weird. When we priests talk about the Trinity to our people, we must be careful not to pass on simplifications which distort the truth of God so that parishioners never come to properly grasp the awesomeness of this great doctrine.

Some Mums could be tempted to say: “Your Daddy is Daddy to you. He is Son to your Nana. He is husband to me. Your Daddy is just one man but he has three different roles: father, son and husband. And that is what God is like. One person with three different roles.

Sound good? No! It does not explain the Trinity at all well. God is not one Person with three different roles. God is three distinct Persons with one substance, one Nature.

For the first 400 years of its existence the Church agonised over a proper understanding of the Trinity. It was a matter of terrible controversy. Sometimes feelings ran high. It was said in Alexandria that you never discussed the Trinity with your barber for fear of having your throat cut.

While that Mum’s explanation of the Trinity is easy to understand, it is hopelessly inadequate.

Does it matter? Yes! Truth does matter. Especially truth about God. Not to worry about the truth about God is to demean God; something the early Fathers were very aware of.

Jesus revealed God as a Trinity of three distinct Persons. The Father He called ‘Abba’. In turn on two occasions, at Jesus’ Baptism and at the Transfiguration Jesus was called ‘Son’ by the Father. And Jesus frequently

spoke about a third Person- the Advocate or the Holy Spirit who would come upon the Church and lead it to a fullness of truth after His death.

Jesus made it clear that He was neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit and that the Father was not the Spirit. It was not a matter of one Person fulfilling three distinct roles. But while they were three distinct Persons, they were bonded into a unity. They were one in their inner being, in their very substance. There is one God; not three.

This is enormously hard to grapple with. In the 300's an influential Bishop called Arius tried to explain the Trinity by teaching that there must have been a time when only the Father existed and Jesus and the Holy Spirit did not exist. And then at some stage, before the creation of the Universe, the Son and the Holy Spirit were created by the Father and given God-like powers. They were, in a sense, sub-gods.

This teaching gained huge acceptance because it made the Trinity easier to understand. But at the Council of Nicea in 325, the assembled Bishops of the Church rejected Arianism as untruth. They taught that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were not creations of the Father; They always were and like the Father were all-knowing, all-powerful and all-present.

The Council of Nicea taught that from all eternity Jesus was begotten of the Father. He has come forth from within the Father from all eternity and is in all ways equal to the Father. The radical energy of the infinite love between the All-Mighty Father and All-Mighty Son generated the Third Person- the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has processed from the love between the Father and the Son from all eternity and is one in-being with both of them.

It is a mystery most profound. We cannot understand it. We never will.

How can we express the Mystery? Nothing will ever be adequate.

Some struggling efforts:

The Father is the song, the Son is the singer; and the Holy Spirit is their singing.

The Father is love, the Son is the lover and the Holy Spirit is their loving.

Overarching it all is the truth that the very essence of God is Love. The love of the Trinity has overflowed into the Creation of the Universe. As part of God's Creation we are immersed in the love song within the Trinity.

It is in truth a huge mystery; the mystery of God's Being; the mystery of God's immense, infinite love.

Is it all too much? By no means! When we open our hearts to God's love and experience God's love overshadowing us, doubt in this wonderful Doctrine disappears like the early morning mist before the sun.