

The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for Trinity Sunday
Sunday May 30th 2021

The Collect at the start of today's Mass speaks about the Word of truth, the Spirit of sanctification, and the wondrous mystery: truth, sanctification and mystery, these are like three keys that turn together in a lock and open for us the meaning of this celebration, and also open for us what we are doing when we celebrate Mass together.

When we celebrate Mass, we are placing ourselves deep in the heart of The Trinity. It is worth reminding ourselves that as we celebrate Mass it is not, in a sense, us doing something at all. For all eternity Jesus offers himself to his Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and as we celebrate Mass we tune ourselves in, as it were, to that offering for a while. All of time is one long and glorious Eucharist, in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit endlessly, timelessly, gloriously give and receive.

The celebration of Mass brings us into the realm of Truth. There are many things in the world that are matters of opinion, or matters of taste, but there are some which are beyond opinion and taste, they are simply true. It is quite easy to confuse all of these things sometimes, to mistake truth for opinion, or opinion for truth. This is one of the reasons that we celebrate Mass together, week after week: to put ourselves in the way of deep truth, because by spending time in the presence of truth here there is a better chance that, out there in the everyday world, we will be able to recognise the difference between truth and opinion, truth and taste.

Coming to Mass we expose ourselves to this timeless truth:

God is eternal, and beautiful, and beyond our understanding, but in spite of this he wants our lives to meet with his life.

God is loving and wants for us the best life that we can have.

God is gift, generous and sacrificial gift, which we see as he takes our bread and our wine and turns them into himself before returning them to us.

God has created us in his image, so he has created us for gift, too, and this gift begins when we glorify him, when we say and sing that we are small and he is great but his greatness is wonderful to see.

God has created us to live in a way that is lively for us and life-giving for people around us.

This brings us on to the fact that the celebration of Mass also brings us sanctification. The celebration of Mass helps us to become more holy: not more holy than everybody else, but more holy than we would otherwise have been. What does this mean? It just means that by spending time in the presence of the Holy One we soak up some of his holiness. When you see someone endlessly giving themselves, with great generosity and joy; when you are endlessly the recipient of this giving you can hardly help yourself from being a bit more generous with your own life, and this is sanctification, this is becoming more like the Holy One on whose face we look at Mass. There is no-one more admirable than God, and at Mass

we admire him and like all people we admire we wish we were a bit more like him, and that wish is the parent from which is born the decision that, actually, we will do what it takes to become a bit more like him, and he helps us to make this happen, and this is sanctification.

All this is, of course, in some sense mystery. And it is worth reminding ourselves what mystery means. Mystery is not like a murder mystery, something that very clever people can sit down and solve, sit down and work out. 'Mystery' within the celebration of Mass means something that we do not understand, and never can, because being humans (rather than God) there are some things that we will never understand, and that is ok. Some things are just bigger than human minds can get themselves around, and that really is ok. A mystery is something to be experienced, not something to be understood. We know this, of course, if we stop to think about it. If we are watching a glorious sunset across a beautiful landscape, we want to enjoy it, to see it, to hear the birdsong, to smell the smells – we don't want someone explaining to us about light refraction and migration patterns and olfactory sensations. When we are with someone we love we don't want someone trying to explain to us what neurological and hormonal activities might be at work, we just want to revel in the feeling of loving and being loved. A mystery is something to be experienced, not to be understood. And if we try and understand it we will not only spoil the wonder of it, but we will also drive ourselves crazy, and turn the experience of human living into a series of transactions and exchanges, which is mere existence, not really living at all.

Truth, sanctification and mystery, these are at the heart of the Trinity, and at the heart of what we do each week at Mass. Here we experience the truth, open ourselves up to sanctification, and experience the beauty of mystery. This is strong stuff: strong enough to get us through whatever the coming week might throw at us.