

The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for Trinity Sunday (Year A) 4th June 2023

'Firmly I believe and truly,
God is three and God is one...'

Perhaps the most famous of all hymns to the Trinity, Cardinal Newman's poem is an extract from his much longer work *The Dream of Gerontius*. Looking a little deeper we can see, then, that it isn't originally intended as a meditation on The Trinity: it is words put into the mouth of a man who knows that death is approaching. It is not really a hymn at all, it is a dying man's confession of what he believes most important in the world. As his life draws to a close he feels that he must speak out, speak deep truth: He is unwavering, there is no question, God is three and God is one. I am going to the Trinity, he is saying. I commend myself to that community of love which is God. Newman is telling us through this poem that this Feast is not the celebration of an idea, of a dogma, of a piece of theology: it is a celebration of the personal God, a celebration of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, of the whirling dance of love that is God. As Gerontius lies on his deathbed, this really, really matters to him. But what about us? What difference does it make to us that God is three persons in one God – what difference will it make to us come Monday morning? I will come back to that.

When God passes in front of Moses, Moses' reaction is instinctive: he bows down and worships: that is to say, Moses acknowledges 'I am a creature, you are the creator; I have nothing to say, because you are greater than I am'. He does not try to understand the mystery of God, he does not try to explain it, he simply worships. This Feast is not really about understanding the Trinity, it is about responding to the Trinity, and the only proper response is to worship: you are great and I am small, and that's ok. The mystery of God passes before us and with our eyes bowed low we can say, 'You are mystery, you are beyond understanding, and that is ok, I am comfortable with that'. There is no surer mark of a fool than a person who says 'I must understand everything'; the wise person is able to say 'while there are many things that I can understand, there are some things I do not and cannot understand, and I am ok with that; all is well'. The Trinity is a beautiful family of love, a triangle of gift, gift lovingly given, and lovingly accepted. And if we accept the law of nature written into the human creature that 'we become what we worship', then to worship a family of love and gift will help us to become people of love and gift, and that does matter.

What do you place at the centre of life? What do you bow down before and say 'here is something greater than me, something of infinite value?' What claims your attention most of all? Trinity Sunday matters not because it is about doctrine and belief, but because it is about worshipping the God who is a family of love and gift, so that we can become people of love and gift. The biggest and most dangerous alternative is that we make ourselves the centre of the world and end up worshipping ourselves. And then, because human beings become what they worship, we fall in love with a particular image of ourselves and everything around us is valued or dismissed according to whether it enhances or disturbs that image that we glimpse reflected in the water. When we place ourselves at the centre of the world, we start to judge the value of

everything purely according to how it promotes me. That is a very particular way of living, and it is not appealing. When everyone becomes their own God, everyone else becomes a competitor, and life becomes a free for all. Trinity Sunday invites us all to stop and look at the greatness of God, the greatness of a perfect family of love and gift, and say: 'Here is something greater than me, and that is good'. We could go a little further and say that this feast invites us to look at the Trinity and say 'I am not the centre of the world, and that's ok, I am at peace with that'.

And that brings us back to what difference The Feast of the Trinity makes to our lives, what difference it makes as we tumble out of bed on Monday morning and a new week begins. Can you imagine how the world might look if one morning everyone were to get up and say 'I am not the centre of the world, and that's ok'? Can you imagine how your work place, or your family, or your neighbourhood, or indeed any group of people might look if we were all to say: 'Its ok, I am not the centre of the world, and I don't need to be. I am happy with that'? Trinity Sunday matters because it makes us stop and say just this. It invites us to worship, to acknowledge the greatness of the family of love and gift which is the Trinity, and it saves us from narcissism. We can be more human, more whole, and in fact more happy, too, when we can say this.; when we can stop and say 'To you (not to me, to you) be glory and praise for ever more'. Its ok, it really is.