

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR TRINITY SUNDAY (B) 7th JUNE 2009

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – the name into which we were baptised, the Holy Trinity whom we always celebrate on the Sunday after Pentecost.

We use the same name to start our prayer.

It sounds complicated.

There is a temptation to say the words and then concentrate on simply praying to God. Unfortunately that's not valid option.

If we think about our prayers during Mass we cannot escape the fact that we pray to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the Gloria we start by praising God, but in the second section we are giving glory to “almighty God and Father”, next we are giving glory to our Lord Jesus Christ “only Son of the Father” and finally we give glory to Jesus with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father.

Every time we pray the Gloria we are praising the Holy Trinity.

In our Eucharistic Prayers we find ourselves addressing the Holy Trinity, too.

We speak directly to God the Father, but through Jesus Christ his Son.

We ask the Father to bless and approve our offering and to let the bread and wine become, not his body, but “the body and blood of Jesus Christ, your only Son our Lord.”

The consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is worked not by God the Father but by his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. We pray “Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ” Here in the Second Eucharistic Prayer we are praying to the Holy Trinity, asking God the Father to let God the Holy Spirit consecrate the bread and wine as the body and blood of God the Son.

We end our Eucharistic Prayer by asking the Son and the Holy Spirit to communicate our prayer to God the Father.

We cannot escape the Holy Trinity in our prayer.

It seems unnecessarily complicated.

Why can't we pray simply to God like Jewish and Muslim believers do?

They think that we are praying to three Gods, so that's one reason why have to try to explain why we believe that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is one God.

The full explanation has not been revealed but there are clues and in the way in which Jesus relates to God and in which Christians relate to God in their experience and their prayer.

When Jesus lived on earth as a human being he occupied time and space. His presence was limited to one time and one place. He could not be everywhere.

Yet God remained everywhere. Heaven was not empty. So while Jesus was wholly God he did not contain within himself the entire presence of God. There was more to God than Jesus. Moreover the Gospels clearly say that Jesus prayed not to himself but to the “Father”. In the Gospels there is a clear distinction between God the Father and God the Son. This is most clearly revealed when Jesus died on the Cross. Jesus, who was God, died, but God did not die. God raised Jesus to life on the third day. God the Father and Jesus the Son are clearly distinct.

Jesus made it very clear that after his Ascension he would take his place alongside the Father. While keeping his identity he would live as God the Father lives, a wholly spiritual being. His disciples would no longer see him or talk to him as a human being, but he promised them the “Advocate”, who would guide and support them as he had taught and supported them. The Advocate was also God, God the Holy Spirit, not the same as Jesus. Jesus retained his own identity. The Holy Spirit is God but not Jesus. The apostles recognised the Holy Spirit as the same God but they never called him Jesus. The God of the Apostles was Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This was the only way that the apostles could describe their experience of God.

If we think about our experience of God in prayer we might be able to relate to this. We believe that God created and sustains the world. He is the source of all life. We instinctively pray to God to give us life now and in eternity. This is God as Father, at the heart of everything, so great, infinite in fact, that he is beyond human understanding, rather remote, rather difficult to relate to.

Jesus makes God the Father known to us, makes a closer relationship with God possible. He makes God accessible to us as human beings.

He is present with us in the Blessed Sacrament and comes to us at Holy Communion. This is how we experience Jesus, more directly, more intimately than God the Father. We still direct our prayer to God the Father on whom everything depends, but we communicate with him through Jesus. We need a more human focus. That’s why we usually end our prayers by saying “through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is God but is distinct from God the Father. This is God as Son.

Jesus is present with us in the Sacraments, but Christians sometimes experience God with them spontaneously in a purely spiritual way, as a divine spirit communicating directly with their human spirit, “moved by the Spirit” as St. Paul says. This is God as Holy Spirit. Just as the apostles experienced the Holy Spirit as a gift from Jesus rather than Jesus himself, so can we. The Holy Spirit is not a vague impersonal sensation but the presence and power of God the Father in heaven and of Jesus Christ his Son who has ascended to him. Our spirits relate most immediately to God as spirit.

So if we think about our experience of God and how we relate to him in prayer we are in fact praying to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The Trinity explains our relationship with God. That should be sufficient explanation.

Let us continue to pray confidently “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Rev Geoff Carey