

- Reflections for a Time of Pandemic –
Trinity Sunday

* ‘When Am I Truly Human?’ *

Our enforced life style changes over nearly three months have caused many to pause, to be less busy, to reflect. Some have found this harder to do than others.

Lives full of activity make reflection more difficult, especially self reflection. Yet self reflection is essential for true happiness.

We need to reflect upon who we are, what our lives are about and where we are going in life.

A key question which needs to be answered if we are to find answers to other life questions is: ‘When am I being truly human?’ This is a basic question of the human heart.

For those of Jewish and Christian faith, the question leads to God. This is because the opening chapter of the Bible reveals that human beings have been created in the image and likeness of God.¹ Insights into God give insights into what is genuinely human.

Jesus revealed the Trinity

Today, we celebrate the ultimate revelation of God. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, revealed that the One God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And his final command to his Apostles was to²

Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...

The ‘Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’ are the *name* (not the names) of the One God. Yet, though they are one God, each is distinct from the other. St Paul highlights this in our seconding reading when he wished the Corinthians³

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

¹ Genesis 1:27

² Matthew 28:19

³ 2 Corinthians 13:13

The Holy Trinity is a 'mystery'

No finite human mind can fully grasp its infinite Creator. Indeed, given our lack of understanding of the created universe, it is hardly surprising that we cannot understand fully God.

We speak of the Trinity, therefore, as a 'mystery'. In its religious sense, 'mystery' refers to experiences of God which are deeply personal. They are experiences into which there will always be new insights, and so can never be fully understood.

God's purpose in creating humanity was to love. By revealing the Trinity through Jesus, God was teaching us how to enter into personal relationships with our Creator, even though we can never fully understand God.

God's purpose: that we enter into the Mystery of the Trinity

Much has been written about the Trinity. Doctrinal formulas have been developed over centuries.

Our first priority, however, must be to respond to the experiences the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit offer so as to enter into this mystery for, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains ⁴

We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch. 'The believer's act (of faith) does not terminate in the propositions, but in the realities (they express)'.

The simplest way to recall experiences of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is to recall the stages of God's self revelation. We limit ourselves to examples for there are too many revealed experiences of God to recall now.

The human heart created to seek God

For the first examples, we need to recall that God created the human heart to be moved by the created universe. Different aspects move different people. For some, this may be its beauty; for others, its power; for others again, its order.

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1707

For thousands of years, the hearts of people have been moved to wonder in awe; to try to understand; to describe in literature and to portray in art. Many have made responding to creation their life's work, such as scientists and farmers; artists and horticulturalists; astronomers and environmentalists.

Those who follow their hearts find themselves beginning to wonder: 'How did the universe come to be?' 'Who brought all of this into existence?' 'What are they seeking from us?' 'How should we respond?'

Those who reflect on their hearts also discover yearnings which incline them look beyond themselves because they realise that these yearnings cannot be fulfilled completely by finite human beings. They include yearnings for inner peace and freedom, unconditional love and lasting happiness.

They include yearnings to be able to change for the better so that people can more easily live their ideals. They want freedom from selfishness, to love more: from judgmentalness, to be more merciful; from self-centredness, to be socially just; from hard heartedness, to be more compassionate.

Entering into the mystery

The first way to enter into the mystery of the Trinity, therefore, is to listen to our hearts, which will lead us to keep searching for ever deeper experiences of God.

We need to praise God for the marvels of the Earth and universe, and to ask God to lead us to the fulfilment of our heart yearnings.

God's self-revelation before Christ

Human beings on their own developed different ideas of the divine. Some saw created things as 'gods' – such as the sun, the moon, and particular animals.

Abraham

God intervened into human history around 1800 years before Christ, reaching out to Abram whom God renamed Abraham because his role was to be the father of the Jewish people.

Through their experiences of God, Abraham and his descendants learned, for example, that God

- Has made promises which we can trust and build our lives on ⁵
- Can bring good out of evil ⁶

Moses

Around six centuries later, the descendants of Abraham were slaves in Egypt. God called Moses to serve as the prophet who would lead them to freedom.

God revealed to Moses the divine name – Yahweh. This was a sign of God’s willingness to be called upon in any time of need – a sign of a new level of relationship. ⁷

As their experiences of God increased, Moses and the children of Abraham learned that God is a savior ⁸

... God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and constancy, maintaining faithful love to thousands, forgiving fault, crime and sin ...

Through Moses, God created an even deeper level of relationship with the descendants of Abraham. God entered into a Covenant, which included what have come to be called the Ten Commandments. Their purpose was to help people avoid behaving in ways which would damage this new level of relationship with God,

A Messiah

Finally, around 700 years before Christ, God started calling prophets, including Isaiah and Jeremiah. Abraham’s descendants constantly proved themselves incapable of being faithful to the relationship God gave them.

Frequently, they fell into sin as a nation. God then promised the coming of a Messiah or ‘Christ’ who would establish a new relationship again between God and the human race, not

⁵ Genesis 12:1-3

⁶ Genesis 50:19-20

⁷ Exodus 3:14

⁸ Exodus 34:6-7

just the descendants of Abraham. Through this Messiah, God would empower those who believed by sharing with them God's own Spirit. ⁹

Entering the mystery

We enter the mystery of the Trinity, therefore, by placing our faith in God. This means trusting God

- to keep God's promises
- to bring good out of evils we may be experiencing
- to love unconditionally
- to see us through tender and compassionate eyes
- to be faithful always
- to love us always
- to forgive our sins if we are repentant.

The coming of Jesus

God's promise of a Messiah was fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ. As mentioned earlier, it was Jesus who revealed the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus revealed the Father

By revealing himself to be the Son of God, Jesus was revealing also God the Father. Previous experiences of God by the descendants of Abraham revealed God the Father as the ultimate Source of all blessings.

Jesus taught that God the Father not only loved people in general, but also every human being personally. God knows each so intimately that ¹⁰

... even the hairs on your head have been counted.

Jesus came to share his divine life

In revealing himself to be the Son of God, Jesus explained why he came - to share his divine life with all who believe¹¹

⁹ Ezekiel 36:27

¹⁰ Matthew 10:30

¹¹ John 10:10; 4:16

I came that they may have life and have it to the full.

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him ... may have eternal life.

Jesus shares his own relationship as the Son with God the Father

By sharing his divine life with believers, Jesus was revealing a new, mind-blowing level of relationship between God the Father and the believer: the believer would share Jesus' own relationship as the Son of God with God the Father.

Jesus promised during the Last Supper that he and the Father would dwell in all who believe and are baptised ¹²

Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and will be loved by my Father, and we shall come and make a home in that person.

Through their personal experiences of God the Father and the Son within, believers would deepen in God's mystery. They would grow to know God with their whole being, not just their intellects ¹³

And eternal life is this: to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Jesus: the Mediator between God and humanity

Jesus revealed that believers can relate with God the Father only through himself as Mediator. ¹⁴ This is because he is both divine and human: the Son of God and the Son of man.

Jesus revealed the Holy Spirit

Jesus revealed also the Holy Spirit. As Mediator, it is he who shares the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Father, with believers. ¹⁵

¹² John 14:23

¹³ John 17:3

¹⁴ John 14:6

¹⁵ John 16:7

This is the Spirit who led and empowered Jesus in his ministry in this world.¹⁶ The baptised would know him, Jesus taught¹⁷

... because he dwells with you, he will be in you.

St Paul later reminded the Christians in Rome that they are empowered to live as Christ calls¹⁸

... since the Spirit of God dwells in you

Redemption

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered and died on a cross. By doing so, he won redemption or freedom from the slavery of sin.

He began his ministry by showing, first, that he came to free people from experiences of ‘sin before the law’.¹⁹ Through visible miracles, he showed that his power offered healing for their lives; freedom from whatever was crippling their efforts to be the people God created them to become; sight, where they cannot see themselves, others and their lives as God does.

Jesus showed, second, that he came to free them from their sins, forgiving the repentant for breaking God’s commandments.

Salvation

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rose from the dead. He won salvation for all believers by sharing with them the Holy Spirit, through whom he shares his divine life.

This is the life which, if nurtured by prayer and receiving the Eucharist, empowers the baptised to grow to become more Christ-like in their thinking, words and behaviour, and to live even Jesus’ most personally challenging teachings.

¹⁶ Luke 4: 1, 14

¹⁷ John 14:17

¹⁸ Romans 8:9

¹⁹ Romans 5:13

Jesus taught that the Spirit will guide his followers and strengthen them in the face of persecution.²⁰

The vine and the branches

Jesus called his followers to remain in him like a vine and its branches. It is the Holy Spirit whom he shares who binds all together.

St Paul later used the image of the Body of Christ,²¹ the Holy Spirit being like its soul and the baptised, the body of Christ's members.²²

Entering the mystery of the Trinity

Jesus Christ makes possible today a relationship with God which would be unimaginable if he had not revealed it. We can enter into its mystery by

- praying to the Father, the ultimate Giver of all blessings, and worshipping – especially in the Eucharist – through Jesus as Mediator²³
- seeking from Jesus, the Son, freedom or 'redemption' from all in us which is not of God, including the forgiveness of our sins
- seeking from Jesus, the Son, the empowerment of the Spirit or 'salvation' to live like Christ
- seeking from the Holy Spirit the guidance and strength for our daily lives.

Basic doctrines

The feast of the Trinity, therefore, is primarily about striving to respond to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit so as to enter into the Mystery of God.

The feast reminds us that there is one God: that this God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal in every way: that, together, they share one divine nature.

²⁰ John 16:13; Matthew 10:20

²¹ Colossians 1:18

²² see 1 Corinthians 6:14

²³ John 14:6

Though equal as the Son of God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus accepted the limitations of human nature, except for sin, for the years in which he lived in this world [Philippians 2: 6-7; John 14: 28].

We speak of them as three Persons, not in the sense of three individuals, but in the sense of their relationships with each other and with us.

When am I truly human?

The whole history of God's engagement with humanity reveals God's selfless love. After all, what benefit does relating with finite human beings bring to God?

Jesus called those who follow him to love selflessly, like him. We behave in truly human ways, therefore, every time we love selflessly, like God who called people into relationship over thousands of years.

We do so every time we give without counting the cost; every time we forgive, no how deeply hurt we might be; every time we go out of our comfort zones and life routines to respond to others' needs.

Selfless love stretches us, for I calls us to use our gifts. However, every time we do so, we are developing and discovering further ourselves and what we have to offer others.

Selfless love is not easy – but we can seek from Christ the power of his redemption and salvation to empower us in our struggles.

Conversation with Christ

Let us pause now for personal conversation with Christ. Let us ask him to help us recognise where we need to love more so as to become more truly human.

Bishop Gerard Holohan

6th June 2020

Below is the link to the Mass to be livestreamed on Sunday at 9am

<https://youtu.be/yLEvTDbzGuw>

And the link of the recording available directly after Mass

<https://www.facebook.com/BunburyParish/>

