

## Holy Trinity

Did you ever see or read about an Indian man who was in a train station with his older brother when he was about five or six years old and somehow got on to a train which carried him far away? He ended up in an orphanage and was then adopted by an Australian couple. But he remembered some details of the station and as an adult, with the help of all our technical skills today, was able to locate that train station in India on a map. He loved his adopted Australian parents but he wanted to find his brother and mother. He found them. His mother, after twenty years, was still waiting for him.

There is something absolutely elemental about blood relationships. People want to know who brought them into the world. Recently a woman in her sixties met with my cousins and me to talk about her father, our cousin, whom she had never met and whom her mother would never talk about with her. We could show her some childhood pictures of her father, and even that little bit seemed to help her. A friend who died recently in her late seventies forever talked about her father. He had found her in an orphanage when she was three or four and took her home. She loved him beyond words all her life.

Those experiences mirror what we are celebrating today on this feast of the Holy Trinity. We are all God's children by the very fact that we exist. But Jews claim that God has created a new relationship with them beyond that of creation by intervening in history on their behalf. And Christians claim that God has created a third and more intimate, indeed most intimate, relationship with the human race by becoming one with it in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. All of these relationships express God's love for us. God would not have created for us if He did not love us. But to intervene in history for a particular people goes beyond this first relationship, and then this union with us in Jesus goes beyond this second relationship with the people of Israel. We speak of these last two relationships as God's adopting us into His divine family.

But in claiming that God is one with us in Jesus of Nazareth Christian faith made problems for itself, for how can one person be both God and man and yet one? And yet that was the experience of those who had experienced Jesus in the flesh. At first they did not reflect on that fact in a metaphysical way, but after experiencing him as risen they were forced to begin to think about what their experience of him meant. And so in John's Gospel, written in the nineties, so some sixty years after the Lord's death, we hear Philip

say to Jesus: “Master, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” And Jesus responds: “Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the father. How can you say, ‘Show us the father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?’” (14:8-10).

Once this understanding of God based on the community’s experience of the risen Jesus was established, theologians could begin to think about what that means about God’s inner life. If Jesus is one with us and therefore shares our human life, but is also one with the Father and therefore shares in God’s own life, then God’s own life includes our life within itself, and our human lives include God’s own life.

A man named Arius, a priest in Alexandria in Egypt in the 300s, offered a way out of such extraordinary claims for us humans by saying that Jesus was not really divine, that the word of God which became flesh in Jesus was itself a creature, a creation of God, and therefore not in itself divine but a creature. At its first major council in 325, that of Nicea, the church rejected his position. No, the bishops at that council said, the Word of God which takes on a human identity in Jesus of Nazareth, is not a creature but is itself

divine, part of God's own nature, part of God's own life. And that means that even within God's own life there is a duality, that of the Father and His Word. Moreover, the church will then go on to insist that this duality is really a trinity, for the Father and the Word express themselves even within themselves in their Holy Spirit and act in it in the world. God is relational and triune.

Strange as it sounds, this understanding of God's own reality is very contemporary. We quite naturally today presume that to be is to be in relationship. An old song said: "You're nobody till somebody loves you." Love implies relationship. But our scriptures define God as love. Therefore, God as love must live in relationship. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live in relationship with each other. Indeed, their very names tell us that.

If you watched the royal wedding last weekend, you heard the American Episcopalian bishop who preached quote the Jesuit priest and scientist Teilhard de Chardin who once wrote that when the world harnesses the power of love, it will have discovered fire for the second time. In celebrating the Holy Trinity today, we are celebrating fire, the divine fire which is God and has expressed itself in Jesus of Nazareth and his spirit. And we, in adhering to

Jesus and his Spirit in faith, hope and love, can become fire for our world, the fire of divine love.