

'All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.' (John 16:15)

Today is Trinity Sunday. In many churches preaching on the Trinity is the short straw! Explaining how God is both three and one is philosophically complex; all examples and analogies, such as three petalled flowers with one stem may be helpful but are ultimately misleading. The great second century theologian Bishop Irenaeus taught his congregation that the Trinity is like two hands operated by the mind. Each are distinct in themselves, but each cannot operate without each other. This sound promising – it is much better than three petalled flowers because it conveys something of the way God *operates* in the world and in our lives, just as we operate in the world. But in the end the analogy fails. What about the one-handed person? Does the mind *need* hands or body to operate?

So, we are not going to solve the problem exactly how God as Trinity can be three in one, but we can reflect on why the idea of the Trinity is absolutely crucial for our Christian understanding of God.

In the passage from John's Gospel we heard today (John 16:12-15), the key idea is that the Trinity is truth and that this Truth is not some abstract idea but a dynamic *relationship* in itself and with the world. The passage tells us that the relationship of the Spirit to the Son is to continue to guide, inspire and develop the teaching of Jesus beyond his earthly life, which it does through prayer, reflection, the Church and the teaching of inspired teachers. As Jesus, the Son, is the 'Way, the Truth and the Life', who sacrificed his life for the Truth, then it follows that the Spirit is also the Truth, the Spirit of Truth. But as Son, Jesus is the Truth because of his relationship to God the Father. As Father, God is the creator of everything, and therefore the source of all that is true, good, beautiful and just.

All this complexity is summarised by Jesus in just a few words: 'All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he [the Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you.'

So, I hope you can see that the Trinity is not merely an *idea* but rather the powerful and active presence of the God of Truth and all that is true in the world. World events at the moment indicate to us how desperately we need to reconnect with the God of Truth.

The terrifying events in Ukraine haunt us all. Everyday we hear of yet another atrocity - innocent children, men and women who are promised immunity from the war only to be slaughtered; the Russian army continues to carry out indiscriminate bombing of military and civilian targets only for Putin and the Russian media to deny that such things have taken place and to state that what is reported is Western propaganda.

What events like this illustrate is that truth is not merely an abstract idea, it directly affects every aspect of how we see the world and how we live in it. We can see all too clearly what happens when truth is replaced with untruth, falsehood and lies.

In his famous Nobel Prize lecture in 1970 the Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn ended his speech by quoting an old Russian proverb: 'One word of truth outweighs the whole world.' Solzhenitsyn had been a Russian army officer in World War 2, but his critical and outspoken view of Communism and Marxism resulted in his arrest and deportation to the labour camps of the Gulags.

Speaking the truth and the world's reception of it reminds us of the words in the opening prologue of John's Gospel: the Word 'was in the world, and world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him' (John 1:10).

In his lecture Solzhenitsyn made a distinction between two kinds of artist or writer. The first sees himself to be an independent creator of a world created through his own imagination only to discover that he is far too weak ever to sustain it. 'Just as man in general,' as Solzhenitsyn wrote, 'having declared himself the centre of existence, has not succeeded in creating a balanced spiritual system.'

But the other kind of artist or writer 'gladly works as a humble apprentice beneath God's heaven'. This person does not seek to dominate the world, but to work in harmony with it. This artist understands the nature of Trinitarian truth. Solzhenitsyn goes on to say:

The artist has merely to be more keenly aware than others of the harmony of the world, of the beauty and ugliness of the human contribution to it, and to communicate this acutely to his fellow-men. And in misfortune, and even at the depths of existence – in destitution, in prison, in sickness – his sense of stable harmony never deserts him.

As Christians it is our duty, like the humble artist, to witness to the Truth as revealed in the fellowship of the Three-in-One God and to play our part in creating a world of beauty, goodness and justice. To this end we have the ever-present example of the Son, the inspiration of the Spirit, and the dynamism of the Father.

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