

Koinonia and Economia

Trinity Sunday – 11th June 2017

Someone asked a Vicar whom he had voted for in the General Election.

He replied, that it would be inappropriate for someone in his position to disclose his political allegiances – however – should the Tories be victorious, the first hymn on the following Sunday would be *'Now thank we all our God'*. If Labour won, it would be *'O God our help in ages past'*, and if the Liberals were successful the congregation would sing *'God moves in a mysterious way'*.

Well, I have reviewed today's hymns, and assure you that nothing political is to be read into the appearance of the words *'strong'* and *'stable'* appearing in one of them ...

Rather, they reflect the fact that today is Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate that central mystery of the Christian faith – of unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

KOINONIA

But it is also timely, that after a fraught and surprising election, St Paul should remind the Corinthians and us that we are to 'agree with one another' and 'live in 'peace''. He finishes with words that have become familiar as a prayer:

'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all'.

This is a very early Trinitarian formula, in which Paul relates the inner life of God as grace, love and fellowship, to the life of the Christian community. The key word here is *'koinonia'* translated as 'communion here, but really a very slippery and multi-layered word that means 'fellowship, sharing, 'mutual-indwelling'.

The Church has been described as the social miracle of the Trinity.

It is a gathering of people of different ages, backgrounds, class, ethnic and cultural identity. We do not choose those around us, but they become our brothers and sisters by virtue of faith alone.

We should be constantly aware of how rare and precious this united diversity is, especially in an age when more and more we choose the people the people around us or those we spend time with.

I must admit, I slightly grit my teeth every time someone uses the word 'community' to refer to an alliance of people with a common interest. We might speak of the 'birdwatching' community to refer to fellow twitchers, or the 'skydiving' community for people who enjoy throwing themselves out of planes as a weekend hobby.

But the *koinonia*, the communion shared by the Church and the Trinity is something else and something deeper than just a common interest or hobby. It is not a leisure choice, but a given set of relationships and people among whom we live, people whom we are called to love.

When someone is baptised, it takes place, '*In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*'. God in the Christian faith is defined primarily in terms of relationship, as lover, beloved and love itself. It is into this circle, this pattern of relationships that we are invited to share in through the pouring of water, and the breaking of bread.

We are reminded of this at the beginning of every Mass. To say that we worship '*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*', is to point to a God whose relational life of sharing and fellowship is simply what it means to be a Christian.

In a more atomised and isolated world, questions of participation and relationship are at the heart of many political dilemmas, Brexit perhaps being a good example. The most extreme and challenging version of such issues is reflected in those who carried out the terrorist attacks in Manchester and London. Individuals and groups who had absolutely no sense of participation and commonality with the society around them, Without such '*koinonia*', such fellowship, that they could literally see no value in the people among whom they lived and the place that was their home. The outcome was a suicidal destructiveness, fed by a toxic ideology, in which God and faith are almost as much the victims, along with the injured and the killed.

ECONOMIA

There's another word that is often used about the Trinity, which is more familiar to us from a secular context – economy.

Literally meaning 'house' and 'management', we use it to describe the system by which goods, service and money are delivered and shared for a functioning society.

The economy of the Trinity is about the way in which God relates to the world, and the functional roles that Father, Son and Holy Spirit have with respect to our salvation. For this reason, we sometimes speak of God as 'Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, which is OK, as long we always remember that this temporal description of the divine life should not erode our primary understanding of God as a set of *relationships*, rather than a set of actions.

The economic understanding of the Trinity, does however remind us of the co-operative nature of the divine life, and that we as Christians are called to co-operate with one another in the mission of God in the world. The Gospel today is commonly called 'The Great Commission' – Jesus sends out his disciples to baptise and make disciples – and they are to do so in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God himself is a *collaboration*, and it is this life of co-operative grace that we invite others to share and participate in, as an actual sharing in the divine life.

Nowhere is this seen more in the Eucharist itself, which begins and ends with the Trinity. We are blessed and sent out by a God whose very being and nature is defined by an active love for others, and who bids us to go and do likewise.

After the Manchester bombings, countless people held up signs saying 'One Love'. In a world of loneliness and fragmentation, of selfishness and individualism, the Trinity is the hope and model of friendship and togetherness, of co-operation and sharing – a social miracle of united diversity and diverse unity in the heart of God, the life of the Church, and for the whole of society. It is one love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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