

Trinity (C)

12<sup>th</sup> June 2022

'Holy Trinity: Communion of persons in love'

Prov 8: *I was at His side, a master craftsman ...*

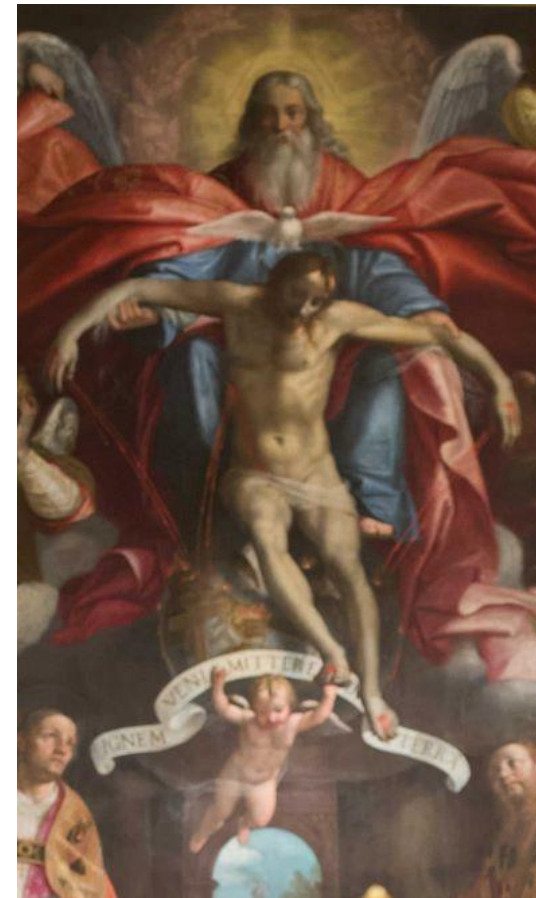
Ps 8: *the heavens, the work of your hands ...*

Rom 5: *hope is not deceptive: the love of God has been poured into our hearts.*

Jn 16: *Spirit takes from what is mine ... Everything the Father has is mine ...*

For years prior to ordination I resisted wearing my glasses all the time. Only when I started to wear them regularly did I realize what I'd been missing. For example, a year after I'd left, I went back to visit my seminary in Rome. I'd sat in its chapel for six years, and never really taken in the decorative details. The chapel is an education in itself, intricate stained glass windows of saints and their histories, wall paintings of saints, and Latin inscriptions, such as the beatitudes, around the walls. Most of this I'd missed. It was strange to see these details for the first time only after I'd left! Perhaps for this reason my focus had only ever been on one thing in the chapel — because of its size I couldn't miss the huge painting of the crucifixion on the wall behind the altar, a painting as old as the college, over 400 years. But there's something special about this painting for me, something I missed when I left (and still miss): it's the fact that it's a painting not only of Christ

crucified, but of the whole Trinity. God the Father is pictured above and behind Christ, supporting His crucified weight with His outstretched arms, and the Holy Spirit as the dove hovering between the Father's head and the head of the Son. The Father's arms and the Son's arms form a deliberate and obvious triangle, representative of the Trinity, with the Holy Spirit at the centre.



Now it's funny, but when one has stared at this image for 6 years, one grows very used to it. I still really miss it — the figures of the Father and the Holy Spirit surrounding, supporting, flanking the Christ figure — because that painting in Rome really seemed to bring the Holy Trinity to life. It shows that the Trinity acts together — one God, one love for the world, one plan for the universe. No longer does the Trinity just seem like some sort of intellectual feat to force one's mind round — 'God is one God, and three persons.' Instead, the Trinity is seen as a living relationship of persons.

It is a key part of what is distinctively Christian, to appreciate that "God is three and God is one." Together with the Jewish people and Islam, yes, we worship the one true God. But we do not know Him just as one unchanging monolithic godhead, single and solitary. We know so much more than that. Through the life of Jesus, and through the experience of Pentecost, we know that all three are the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus's life and teaching attest to it: He speaks to us of God His Father,

and He explains at length the nature of His Father, loving and merciful; He speaks to us of the Spirit as the Spirit of Him and of His Father, and He promised Him, and sent Him.

Through the early Church centuries there were endless, and sometimes bitter, debates as to how to understand this relationship of Father to Son and Spirit. Some went to one extreme and thought of the Son and the Holy Spirit as lesser gods, created by the one true God, the Father. Others went to the other extreme, and saw the Father, Son and Spirit merely as three different 'faces' of the one God. But no, the Church hung onto and clung something more difficult to grasp, but something more true: that there is one God, and three persons, co-equal in everything, acting together, but distinct in their relationship. The development of the Christian creeds, going back to the Church councils of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. in Nicaea and Constantinople, allowed for a carefully constructed expression of the Church's belief. Today, in fact, Trinity Sunday, now we're out of the Easter season, we will

resume the Sunday profession of faith using the Nicene Creed, with its fuller expression of the relationships of the Trinity — about the Son, it says, “God from God, light from light, true God from true God ...”; about the Spirit it says, “the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son ...” — Carefully balanced phrases attempting to capture the essence of this mystery of the Holy Trinity that Jesus’s own sacred teaching has led us so more deeply into.

Why? Why all these words and creeds? Why does God seem complicated when God should be utterly simple? Well, in a way it is simple. *God is love*, as St John tells us. And because love is to be shared, there has to be more than one person. God is complete in Himself, not in need of anyone else, or else He wouldn’t be God. But He wouldn’t be complete if He were only one person. It’s this community of persons in God which demonstrates that He is love. The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the fruit of that love. And they have been three-in-one for all time — happy in love.

We celebrate the Holy Trinity all the time as Catholics: every time we make the sign of the Cross, *in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit*, and often in the conclusion to our prayers, *we make this prayer through Our LJC who lives ...* (or at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, *Through Him, and with Him in Him, O God Almighty Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit etc.*) we give praise to the fact that at the heart of reality, at the heart of all things is a loving personal God. This is the God who has made us and taught us through the Son of God to love Him above all things. He can say this, because He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in love. Let us set ourselves to love God the Holy Trinity as much as He loves us!

Trinity Sunday gives us a chance to reflect on this beautiful truth, and to anchor all the rest of our Christian year in this sublime fact: that God, the loving Trinity, perfect and utterly happy in Himself, chose freely to share His happiness, bestow His love, create a home in which His people could enjoy His benevolence. Everything we

are as Christians comes back to this, and for this we worship Him, and every single day should give Him praise. For without His love, we are nothing ...

***Glory be to the Father, Who by His almighty power and love created me, making me in the image and likeness of God.***

***Glory be to the Son, Who by His Precious Blood delivered me from hell, and opened for me the gates of heaven.***

***Glory be to the Holy Spirit, Who has sanctified me in the sacrament of Baptism, and continues to sanctify me by the graces I receive daily from His bounty.***

***Glory be to the Three adorable Persons of the Holy Trinity, now and forever. Amen.***