

TRINITY SUNDAY, YEAR A, 2020

It is slightly odd that in 'Year A' for Trinity Sunday our readings are not the most Trinity-focused of texts. Jesus alludes to the God (the Father) and himself being the Son; Paul, in the second reading, makes the most explicit reference to the Trinity; Moses, in the first reading, necessarily has no reference to the Trinity. This truth, which makes the Christian faith unique (a Trinity of three persons in the One supreme Godhead) had obviously not yet been revealed.

However, this text of the encounter between God and Moses in the book of Exodus, is extremely important for us as a kind of precursor to the doctrine of the Trinity. For while there is no reference to the Trinity, what it does focus on is the very being or essence of God. And that essence of God can perhaps be summed up in one word: relationality; that God in his very nature is a relational being.

We see it clearly portrayed in Moses' exclamation that the Lord God is 'a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness'. It is worth pointing out some context here. This is not Moses' first time up the mountain to speak to God. He has been 'in relation' with him several times before. On this occasion, God has been giving him instructions on how to build the Tabernacle, but he has been interrupted by the people who are apostatising, celebrating pagan rituals and worshiping the false god of the Golden Calf. After his remonstrations with the people, this is now Moses going back up the mountain to plead for God's forgiveness and for a renewal of the covenant, which God duly does. It is important to note here the significance of Moses bowing to the ground 'and at once worshipped'. In his relations with God, his authentic worship, he is undoing the false worship of the people. Through worship, he is re-establishing right relationship with God who is a relational being. It is not for nothing that during this experience the Lord descends in the form of a cloud, which simultaneously both reveals and conceals the glory of God. Benedict XVI astutely observes in his book, 'The Spirit of the Liturgy', that this is where the use of incense in Catholic liturgy comes from: it is a symbolic reminder to us that, in right worship of the Triune God, God is both magnificently revealed and, simultaneously, mysteriously concealed from view. Even here, long before the revelation of the Blessed Trinity, we have a prior insight to the nature of God: we can never fully comprehend Him.

However, those descriptions of God ('a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness') do reveal more to us of His nature. Being rich in kindness (*hesed*) and faithfulness (*emeth*) were very relational terms in Hebrew. 'Hesed' was not merely kindness in the English sense of the word but 'covenantal fidelity'. The thought of a marriage covenant immediately springs to mind – the most intimate and enduring of relationships (normally!). The word 'emeth' also carried with it the sense of 'truth', of being true to someone, as one would be true to a lover.

In this short scene and description, then, we are being given a brief glimpse into the very deep, one might say, 'romantic', nature of the relationship God has with his people. Yet, these are not just attributes of God; they are who He is in Himself. It is this relationality of the being or essence of God that would be more fully revealed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and His sending forth of the Holy Spirit as the permanent indwelling of His Presence in the life of the Church (which we celebrated last week).

A short homily or reflection is never the place to do justice (as if ever one could!) to the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. However, as difficult as some of the theological language may be surrounding this doctrine, today is a day when we ought to pause and reflect upon this central mystery of the Christian faith. It is worth asking ourselves the question: 'have I ever tried to study and deepen in my knowledge of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity?' It is an important question to ask ourselves; because our failure to be interested in the relationality of the inner being of God (as Father, Son and Holy Ghost), can

often manifest a failure of our desire to be in relationship with Him. And yet, it was precisely for this reason – for Him to be in relationship with us – that he revealed Himself in his true nature in the first place.

If you wish to study the doctrine of the Trinity further, check out the Catechism of the Catholic Church 232-267. It's all free online. <https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>

Happy Trinity Sunday!