

TRINITY *News*

Trinity Sunday The Christian Vision of God

This day is the feast of the day of this church of the Holy Trinity.

The notion of Trinity would never have been clarified in the Church if it could not be appealed to in the first place from the New Testament.

When the first Christians sat down to discuss the stunning events of the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension of Christ, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they were faced with some huge challenges. High on the agenda would have been how they could now shape their vision of God. The towering monotheism of Israel was always in view. That is, one God, and one God alone in any concept of Deity.

The oral and scriptural traditions of the Lord's instructions to them and what he had prophesied about their future would have been foremost in their mind. This is never clearer than in the great commission at the end of Matthew's gospel: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I surely will be with you always to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:16-20).

The text tells of both a commission from the Risen Lord and prophetic words about the future. Some of the first comments that I ever read on this text suggested that these words had been put in the mouth of Jesus by the early church after they had developed their teaching about the Holy Trinity. I never accepted this, because it seemed to me that they were words of a prophetic nature from the Risen Lord. The intent of revealing the Divine Name was surely to impel the believers in the Jesus movement, the Church, to develop and reshape their vision of God in the light of Jesus' life and ministry. Apart from the text here in Matthew they could also appeal to some words from the apostle Paul: "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (II Corinthians 13:13). This 'grace' is a threefold presentation of the unfolding of the love and presence of God in the New Testament.

Moreover, the first distinctive name for God in the creation stories in Genesis is Elohim. The ending of this name is plural, implying a divine society within the heart of God. It is the only chink in the biblical wall around the unity and singularity of God in Judaism. The first Christians may have used it as an entry point into shaping their own vision of a divine society comprised of Father and Son and Spirit.

This It was a courageous act and hugely creative. They were compelled to do so by their vision of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Son of God. The pervasive and powerful presence of the Holy Spirit intensified their awareness of the presence of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7), had to be considered in the Triad of Eternity that would be called the Holy Trinity. Signs and wonders were all around them and they were indeed extending the work of Christ in healing and miracle working in the world.

The *principium*, “the absolute beginning and foundation”, as Aquinas described it, was “Abba”, “Father”, the one to whom Jesus had prayed and instructed his followers to pray to with huge confidence and trust.

The notion of one God in its most absolute sense is maintained by Islam. The Jews also preserve their absolute monotheism, especially in the Tetragrammaton, the four consonants of the divine name, YHWH, a name that they do not pronounce because of its unreachable sacredness.

The Christians took the huge and unprecedented step of saying that God was a divine society of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that this had always been so before time began. Jesus’ coming and its attendant presence of the Spirit confirmed that this divine society of the Holy Trinity was eternal, and the Holy Trinity was therefore the revelation of the heart of God. Christians in the first centuries invented the word *homoousios*, “same substance” to describe Jesus’ divine unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Our vision of God affects the way in which we pray to God. The Jew at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem holding his Hebrew prayer book, bobbing up and down in front of the sacred wall, prays differently to the way in which a Christian prays. Certainly, the notion of praying to the Father is still there, as it was with Jesus as a practising Jew. But the vision that Stephen saw of Christ standing at the right hand of God after his exaltation, is of course not there.

We cannot intrude on the way in which other people pray to God, or make any judgments. But we can assert the vision of God that came out of the hugely creative discussions in the early Church. We pray to that vision of God, to the divine society that gives shape to our own society as church. Trinitarian spirituality will always be more important than Trinitarian definitions. The glorious and Holy Trinity has the stamp of the New Testament upon it. The gospel narratives describe it in a way that no definitions can render. Let us explore what it means to live as a community under the patronage of the divine name, Father, Son, and Holy Trinity.
Amen

Bishop Arthur Jones

📖NEXT WEEK’S READINGS:

Isaiah 2:10-17; Psalm 89 ; Romans 6:3-11; Matthew 10:34-42

THIS WEEK:

Monday, June 20.

NON-WORKING HOLIDAY.

Tuesday, June 21.

- Bible Study, 10am
- Bible Study, 7:15pm @ the Tutton’s (#3 Sta. Potenciana, Urdaneta Village, Makati)

Thursday, June 23.

- Midweek Eucharist, 10am, Chapel