

TRINITY NEWS

Trinity Sunday Reflections on the Mystery Shrouded in Glory

Today we honour the central teaching about our understanding of the theological Image of God, the Holy Trinity. This central teaching is outlined in a threefold form in both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed was drawn up in 325AD by the bishops and their theologians who gathered at Nicaea in what is now Turkey. The Emperor Constantine wanted a clear statement from the Christians in order to make his subjects conform in some way to his own new-found faith, whatever that was, and the bishops complied. When we read the writings of that time we can see that their statements were based on local controversies and their own biblical reflections, not just Constantine's wishes. The third and fourth centuries produced such controversies. The conflicts were added to because theological thinking was caught in a cross-fire of Greek and Latin language and political issues. This was not helpful!

The Gospels give us a kaleidoscope of pictures about how Jesus saw God. The Apostles and the first Christians gathered together those pictures and their writers reflected on them.

1. Jesus saw God as Abba, Father, an endearing term that speaks of the heart of God.
2. Jesus saw Abba as his own Abba, though he would bow in respect when Joseph came into a room. He perceived that he had been sent from the heart of Abba and that he was also part of Abba's heart. The language in John's Gospel about this matter is not just a commentary of the writer, but a reflection of the total thinking of Jesus of Nazareth.
3. Jesus saw the Holy Spirit as having a twofold source. The primal source was in the heart of the Father, but he also saw the Holy Spirit as the luminous continuation of his own presence in the world after his death and Ascension. That is, it would continue a presence that was already evident in his life on earth. In particular he gave great stress to the capacity of the Holy Spirit to remember and recall his person and teaching in the lives of those who loved him. It seems that he saw this as a continuation of his own presence on earth. Pentecost portrays him pouring out the Holy Spirit from the heart of Abba.

These mind-and-word pictures entranced the first Christians and they drew their own conclusions. They were talking about a mystery just as Jesus had done, and they did not envisage the later controversies.

The cryptic lines in the Nicene Creed that we recite in the Eucharist are banner headlines rather than explanations.

My reflections on the Trinity are doxological. That word begins with the Greek word for “glory”, *doxa*. The glory of God fills the temple in a famous passage in Isaiah. It also can come to our inner chapel and bless us with a presence that goes beyond all of our expectations. Only God can authenticate God’s presence in us. The biblical pictures in the Gospels need to be taken into our inner recall rather than being seen only as external matters. The biblical imagery stands as an inexhaustible point of reference, and the imagery needs to be taken into the heart of our thinking. But we also need to look deep down into ourselves to look at the image of God that was given to us as a gift in our own creation as a person. What we see there will affect our prayers, our worship, and the sacred sanity of our beliefs.

The doxology, “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit” draws a fervent “AMEN” from me. I cannot work God out in my mind and I cannot get God out of my thoughts. **I cannot paint or draw the image of God because it has already been splashed in beautiful and irreplaceable pictures on the configurations of our own spiritual being.**

Let us look again at the ‘pictures’ of God in the Gospels, take them into our inner being, and see how they connect with what is already there as a gift from God that came with the gift of life.

Bishop Arthur Jones

NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:

Genesis 3:8-21; Psalm 130
2 Corinthians 4:13-18 Mark 3:20-35

ADVANCE NOTICE:

Vestry meeting, June 25th.