

Trinity Sunday, Sunday, June 16th, 2019

Readings: Proverbs 8:1-11, 22-23, 30-31, Psalm 8, Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-17

Trinity, Community, a Model for Living

Introduction

These last weeks, we have explored a central idea that flows from the consecutive Christian festivals of Ascension, Pentecost and today Trinity: the idea that human beings are invited, called by God, to not just be “forgiven sinners” – as important as that is – but having accessed that liberation of forgiveness to reach beyond, *to rise to the possibility of becoming God’s companions, restoring the world, co-creating with God in the world.* Ascension Sunday, registered the point, that Jesus left his followers, so that they would have the freedom to get on with the job as they saw it. Pentecost Sunday, registered the point, that this vocation of restoring the world, is about breaking out of the apparent “natural” ways of seeing ourselves and others through the restrictive and destructive lenses of culture and language, to something beyond: to a new broad, inclusive idea of community, which embraces others, more generously, more graciously, more fairly and justly, under the *Lordship of Jesus*: what I have called “the romanticism of following Christ”.

Today, we examine the idea of Trinity – God as Three in One, Father, Son and Holy Spirit – for further clues as to what becoming God’s companions, co-creators, restoring the world, might look like. Again, it has to do with community, resembling Pentecost, but differently

Let’s begin our ‘thought journey’ this morning, with the film clip we have just seen. Then we shall move to a bit of theology, and then some conclusions.

Les Choristes

The film, *Les Choristes* or the “Choir Boys”, is a powerful story about the struggle to build a community ‘worthy of the name’ from a group of wounded, abused children, isolated in a Reform School, the name of which, says it all *Fond de L’Étang (Bottom of the Pond)*. As frequently occurs in such places, designed for ‘rehabilitation and healing’, the reality is the reverse: the boys experience abuse, isolated from any meaningful support, and from each other. While they live together, the walls of separation are too high to breach and most lack the capacity or will, to do so. Into this dark space, arrives a failed composer and musician, Clément Matthieu. Matthieu, sharply aware of the brokenness of these children – partly perhaps because of his own suffering – attempts to do something which no one else will – build community, restore these boys, through music. *Infusing his own creativity* into “Bottom of the Pond”, he encourages them to enjoy something together. *Instilling his own energy* into these boys, they begin to see themselves in a new light, discovering and sharing their gifts and capacities, which they had never known existed. Centre stage in all this, is the exceptionally talented boy, Morange: one with the voice of an angel, the single mother of whom, Violette, Clément Matthieu, secretly falls in love. The point that emerges, that stands-out from this story, is this: that relationships through music and later through conversation, when the boys actually begin talking to each other, mends, heals this place. For a time at least, *Fond de L’Étang (Bottom of the Pond)*, becomes *Sommet de la montagne (the summit of the mountain)*: a place of joy, of renewal.

The Trinity

Let’s now move forward a little and turn to theology and what it has to say about community. Some years ago, I worked in the inner city of Sydney: Redfern/Waterloo. It was an interesting, stimulating, complex place that nearly killed me...through exhaustion. It was marked by brokenness all around: the old Anglo power block that ran the local council, the countless women with children, hiding in high-rise public accommodation, in fear of their violent husbands, and the

aboriginal community, the *kooris*. In that situation, I was fortunate to learn from two colleagues: Fr Ted Kennedy, the local Catholic priest, who enjoyed sainthood status among the aboriginal people, and who gained enormous kudos from irritating the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney; and the Anglican priest, John McIntyre, who worked night and day in the area, also annoying the Anglican Sydney Diocese for his support of women's ordination (and the gay communities). He later became Bishop of Gippsland in Victoria. Both are dead now -Ted was an old man even then and John only a few years my senior died suddenly in June, 2014.

I tell you this bit of personal history, because, confronted as we were by broken and isolated people, we began to think together about how we could address the overwhelming challenge. It was not long before we turned our attention to the doctrine of the Trinity – as strange as it may sound – to help us. In reflecting upon this doctrine, we discovered some real insights.

The first, was that the Trinity teaches that God is a community: that Father, Son and Holy Spirit, converse, engage, communicate with each other: *relationships are central, fundamental*.

The second – as suggested by the perceptive art of Andrei Rublev – was that these relationships are respectful. The different persons of the Trinity, nod in deference to each other, and despite the attempts through the ages to identify just who is Father, who is the Son and who is the Spirit, no-one has ever come up with an answer, no-one quite knows. In other words, there is no hierarchy as such, but rather a reciprocity, a mutuality, an equality between them.

Third, the Godhead – God as community – is *more than* God otherwise would be, if He were an old white-haired, bearded gentleman *sitting alone*.

Taken in totality, these members of the Trinity co-exist together. In fact, the word used by ancient scholarship to sum all of this up, was *perichoresis*, meaning a dance: each dancing with the other, moving together, laughing together, weeping together, building together.

Back to Ted, John and I! It was our increasing understanding of this theology of the Trinity, this theology of God as community, which led us to focus our energy upon building relationships between the disparate and quite often hostile groups of Sydney's inner-city. It was not just a political challenge and task, it was not just a relational task – although it was both those things, but – and this is what drove us – it was a deeply theological and ethical task. Over time, it worked, the communities came together, and it was the Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit – who could take the credit. I wonder if they danced in joy at what they saw.