

TRINITY SUNDAY YEAR A (VIRTUAL) HOMILY 2020

UNSURPRISINGLY, SOME MYSTERIES CAN NEVER BE FULLY EXPLAINED!

Jn 3.16-18 Ex 34.4-9 2Cor 13.11-13

Welcome this weekend to our virtual celebration of the unfathomable mystery of Trinity, as we conclude the Easter season, now 81 days since the pandemic shutdown in Australia. There will be the final return to school for all this coming week, with continuing opening up of services in the broader community, but I believe we are still not yet ready for church opening, due to ongoing and sensible requirements for physical distancing and limited numbers, and the potential for confusion and division about who is in and who is out! It's not a raffle or a lottery. Meanwhile, I hope that our virtual Mass celebrations do provide some sense of connectedness and ongoing belonging to our active worshipping parish community, despite the difficulties and disappointment of not being able to fully participate and receive the Eucharist within a physical worshipping community. One of the fruits of the Spirit we celebrated last week, is patience, and we still need lots of it. Once again, we all need to continue to be sensible, maintaining physical distancing, careful hygiene, being generally cautious and attentive to wise and informed community and personal advice.

And in our broader world, we see tragic signs of human division, particularly in USA, where, incredibly, tear gas and rubber bullets were used to clear the way for an obscene photo-op, Bible held up, but unopened outside an Episcopalian Church, while America was burning! As it was once said so well: "When they go low, we go high." So let's hope goodness and right will prevail, and the truth that Jesus proclaims that all are equal in dignity and our common humanity.

Now, here we are, now approaching mid-year, and the shortest day down south, the best thing that the days get longer, in terms of light after the winter solstice of 21st June!

Last week I reflected on how life seemed less complicated in the simplicity and security of those fortunate enough to have loving childhood, in our increasingly unequal and unfortunately divided world. Now, as we come to celebrate the mystery of Trinity, I can never help but go back to Sister Bernadine in Prep in 1958, at St James's Gardenvale, where I clearly remember her drawing a triangle on the blackboard, and there was the simple explanation, not questions asked! I also recall the Garden of Eden allegory, thinking, if only Eve hadn't taken a bit of that apple (*And we all know the Apple symbol, with the one bite taken, perpetuated today on my laptop!*), and handed on the temptation to Adam, we'd all still be happily there, enjoying nature, with plenty of free time, and not having to go to school! It all sounded so easy. Why did she let the devil (*symbolized by the slithering snake!*) make her do it? But we do have to grow up, think for ourselves, and ask questions, because *fides quaerens intellectum* – *faith seeks understanding*, even though we'll never know or understand it all.

As for the mystery of Trinity, by definition we can't get to the bottom of it, try as we may. In the fourth century they even fought wars over the various formulations of the Christian statements of belief. The Nicene and Apostles' Creeds ended up the winners, up to the present, but Athanasius (*aka Athanasius Against the World!*), way back there, had to invent his own Creed, as bishop of Alexandria for 48 years on and off, after being elected by popular acclamation (*beware of populist leaders!*), ending up less at home in his Diocese than away, as he kept getting kicked (*almost literally*) into exile 5 times over the years, by various theological factions, because of all the arguments, and perhaps his fractious, temperamental and argumentative nature! It's a wonder he lived to 75, amid all the conflict and division!! One might wonder why all the fuss over theological definitions, when this mystery of faith continues to this day.

In Ireland, Patrick is reputed to have used the shamrock as a symbol of Trinity, and then we have images of Venn diagrams of intersecting circles, mediaeval art with dove, Son as judge and Father with beard, seated in the glory of the heavens. Then there is Rublev's 15th century Eastern painting of the 3 figures around a table or altar, depicting a unity of persons. When I was parish priest in Manly, there was a shop ironically named 'Wick-ed (Wicked) Candles', and I purchased a 3-wicked candle for my demonstration of Trinity, lighting each wick for a *'show and tell'* homily!

When studying theology back in the 1970's, one lecturer provided a 90 page convoluted dissertation on Trinity, as *'hypostatic union'* of 3 Persons in one God, such that the assessment was that the reader was more confused at the end of reading it than at the start!

Perhaps it's best to apply the **KISS** principle (*'Keep it simple, stupid'*, as I refer to myself, of course!). My take is to look at a prism of 3 dimensions, where **'Father'** refers to God as Creator of life and love, **'Son'** to Jesus, sent by the Father to immerse himself in our humanity to show us the way to faith, life and love, and **'Spirit'** (*not an angry bird I once saw depicted in a stained glass window, but symbolized by the dove of peace with the green olive branch*) as we heard last week, as God's uncontained and ongoing spiritual presence in the world.

Now, back to early in John's Gospel, we can look at the figure of the honest seeker of truth in Nicodemus, the faithful Jew and member of the Sanhedrin, the civic council (*not the National one!*) for the Jewish community in Jerusalem at the time, as he appears from the darkness to see Jesus in the light, but not yet ready to commit to faith in him, as he pops up again, still searching, throughout John's Gospel, finally appearing to help with Jesus' burial. Even as Jesus has called him to faith and to live in the light, it all takes time, and Jesus' call is not to blind faith, but to a reflective faith that is lived out by the true believer, and that's for all of us, as we try to accept and live the mystery.

I conclude with Claude Mostowik MSC's interesting insights into our connectedness, currently necessarily disconnected by the coronavirus pandemic at present: *"We are often fragmented socioeconomically and politically. We are often fragmented without communities, our churches and down to our families. As... (we) are discovering, from Covid-19, this understanding does not accord with human experience. In a very short time, the virus has spread from a Chinese province across the world. It shows how interconnected we are. We cannot escape our fundamental interconnectedness. Human divisions are not relevant here. The virus has ignored borders, race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or age. If anything, this pandemic has at great price, presented us with the reality that what happens to people on the other side of the world, impacts on us. We cannot avoid the fact that we exist in common with others. Today, we celebrate God's wonderful ways of interacting with us. It us a song to God's relationship with us and the whole of creation... God is social. God is a God of relationship. God is not 'up there' but in us and between us... Our theology tells us that we are intertwined or interconnected with each other... We cannot escape this fundamental unity. What God? The God of inclusive love, compassion and peace (as proclaimed by and revealed in the historical Jesus who walked with us and the Jesus of faith who continues to walk among us, enlivened by his Spirit), not "the God of militarism and empire, the God of prosperity and self-indulgence, the God of self-sufficiency, the God of revenge and unforgiveness, the God of fear and cowardice, the God of formality and rigidity, the God of pessimism and negativity."*

No, our Trinitarian God is one of life, love and joy, as, in challenging and uncertain times, we continue to live our lives in *faith and hope and love*, as in *joyful trust we move*, as we sang in that good old hymn, back in my school days at CBC St Kilda in the 1960's.

john hannon

6th June 2020
