

TRINITY SUNDAY

I often wonder if musicians and artists understand the Trinity more naturally, or instinctively than our theologians.

In the very first piece played by Olivier Latry at Friday's unforgettable concert in Orford, Francois Couperin's 'Offertoire' was written in tribute to the Holy Trinity. Written in three parts of course: a grand 'overture', a slow and sometimes dissonant section, and finally a form of gigue. That's what it said in the programme notes anyway, but we are taken on a musical journey of discovery whereby all three parts make up the whole piece – if you just take one extract out, the experience can never be the same. That is also true of Olivier's skilful improvisations – they all have a beginning, middle and end – and you can never be sure which section will make you jump out of your seat and surprise you. There's a playfulness going on and a dance which needs partners...

I think too of the entrance to Holy Trinity Blythburgh and above the doorway entrance, a beautiful contemporary sculpture by Nicholas Mynheer. The dove of the Holy Spirit is nestled between the prayerful Father and the devoted Son and the right hand of the Creator supports and contains all three within a unity and serenity of beautiful grace and intimacy. I only have this small postcard to show you of what I believe to be a stunning work of art...

To listen out for the Trinity or, to just stare up at it, is a compelling way in to experience the mystery and wonder of a compelling faith experiencing the fullness of God in all its breadth and height and depth.

There was a 6th/7th century Irish Saint, Columbanus, (who, according to an eccentric Anglican Bishop is the Patron Saint of motorcyclists) and apart from enjoying his travels across Europe and founding monasteries here and there, had some simple truths to share. I quote from his 'Instructions':

“Who, I ask, will search out the Most High in his own being, for he is beyond words or understanding? Who will penetrate the secrets of God? Who will boast that he knows the infinite God, who fills all things, yet encompasses all things, who pervades all things in his hand, yet escapes the grasp of all things? ‘No one has ever seen God as he is.’ No one must then presume to search for the unsearchable things of God: his nature, the manner of his existence, his selfhood. These are beyond telling, beyond scrutiny, beyond investigation. With simplicity, but also with fortitude, only believe that this is how God is and this is how he will be, for God is incapable of change.

Who then is God? He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God. Do not look for any further answers concerning God. Those who want to understand the unfathomable depths of God must first consider the world of nature. Knowledge of the Trinity is rightly compared with the depth of the sea. Wisdom asks: ‘Who will find out what is so very deep?’ As the depths of the sea are invisible to human sight, so the godhead of the Trinity is found to be beyond the grasp of human understanding. If anyone, I say, wants to know what you should believe, you must not imagine that you understand better through speech than through belief; the knowledge of God that you seek will be all the further off than it was before.”

In these gender-fluid days of ours and, our fascination with AI right now, and whether God can be finally exterminated in the name of advanced science, this advice from a roaming monk still speaks to me. I can’t honestly say that on my various parish visits, the big Trinitarian questions are high up on the list of shared local conversation! But perhaps we should all relax more about this?

What Columbanus is saying really is that, like the organ music or the stone sculpture, just accept the unfathomable mystery and solid joy of God’s threefold love, presence and outpouring in our everyday living.

We come to worship God today because we believe and give thanks for that mystery and 'cloud of unknowing'. In other words, we trust in the Trinity by name and believe in the Trinity through faith.

And so we pray:

To God the Father who first loved us, and made us accepted in the beloved Son; to God the Son, who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own Blood; to God the Holy Spirit, who sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts; to the one true God be all love and all glory for time and for eternity. (Thomas Ken)

Amen.