

Trinity Sunday

1. Sometimes things seem difficult when we think about them and we say to ourselves: “I could never do that.” And yet the solution is often a simple one: “We just do it” and our intellectual difficulties vanish. That may be the case with the feast we celebrate today. We say to ourselves—and with good reason: “I could never understand how God is three yet one.” But then we pray and find that we are doing it. It is as natural for us to pray to God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all the while believing that they are one and not three separate deities, as it is for us to breathe. In fact, for us the opposite is the truth: we cannot imagine praying to a God who is not three in one, who is not Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2. Jewish faith is strictly monotheistic. Indeed, that seems to have been Judaism’s great breakthrough in the history of religion. Prior to this breakthrough people believed in many gods and had to run from one to the other to get all their religious needs satisfied. I suppose we could say that Judaism created the first religious mall, the first single-stop religious shopping. There is one God, and there is no other.

3. Therefore, Judaism must look upon Christian belief in a triune God as a step backwards, or at least a half-step backwards. Yes, you claim to believe in one God, Judaism might say to us, but doesn't your belief in a trinity endanger God's unity, God's oneness?

4. And yet the disciples' belief that in Jesus they had touched the divine and not just the human led them to pray to him as the Son of God. A priest by the name of Arius in the early 300s said that such praying did not mean that Jesus was really divine but only quasi-divine, but at the Church's first major meeting at a place called Nicaea not too far from today's Istanbul, then the new city the emperor Constantine was building, the bishops rejected Arius' view and said that Jesus, though a full human being, was one with God's own, interior Word, and that he was therefore the fully divine Word of God become human. Furthermore, the first disciples were convinced by their own experiences that that God and Jesus had sent their very own Spirit, therefore, a divine Spirit, upon them and changed their lives. And so we end with the formula which Paul used in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."

5. But the first sentence of today's Gospel from John 3:16 says two-thirds of all this very simply. It does not mention the Holy Spirit, but it does include the other two divine persons in its simple formula: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. "Gave" here must be the equivalent of "sent to us, to the world." Judaism believes that God spoke to certain people in the course of history and gave them the job of creating and guiding a special group. We believe the same, but with one difference. The people to whom God spoke in the history of Israel were men who had heard God's word and attempted to convey this divine Word to their fellow Jews. We Christians believe that in Jesus this same Divine Word came in person to call us, to speak to us.

6. Let us hold on to this divine Word with all our strength. Let us treasure his words which the Scriptures give to us. Let us treasure his ideas and values which again the Scriptures give us. Let us treasure his presence among us in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Let us pray alongside him to the Father in the words he taught us. In a word, we have everything in one divine Word, Jesus. So let him rule our minds and our hearts. And let us let his Spirit, who is also the Spirit of the Father, rule our lives, this Spirit who brings peace and pardon.

7. It is from within this belief in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that we attempt to meet our responsibilities today in the world: the responsibilities we have to our dear ones, our families, the responsibilities we have to our church, both local and universal, the responsibilities we have to the state and city. We view questions of immigration and gay marriage from our home in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. What does the Father teach us? What does the Word of God made flesh teach us? What does the Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son teach us about these matters?

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all!