

Trinity Sunday

I thought it might be good today, this Sunday devoted to the Holy Trinity, to go through the readings together. So, if you have a missalette handy, would you please turn to p. 178. The first reading for today is taken from the Book of Proverbs. What is a proverb? The dictionary says a proverb is “a short, traditional saying that expresses some obvious truth or familiar experience.” But in the Bible a proverb is “an enigmatic saying in which a profound truth is cloaked.” In Jewish history King Solomon, King David’s son, was known as a very wise man, that is, until he got old and was led astray by his many foreign wives. Thus this book is said to be the book containing the proverbs, the wisdom, of Solomon, although in its present form it comes from four centuries or so after Solomon’s death, say, in the 400s B.C. We are reading from its 8th chapter, and the first sentence is: “Thus says the wisdom of God: ‘the Lord possessed me, the beginning of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago.’” Do you see what is being said here? When we speak of wisdom, we think of a virtue which a person possesses. “My grandmother was a very wise lady,” we say. But the writer of this verse is making wisdom a person and saying that wisdom (and wisdom in Hebrew is feminine) was with God when God was creating the world. Why would such a text be chosen for

Trinity Sunday? The reason is that the earliest Christian writers, St Paul and the four Gospel writers, preached Jesus as the wisdom of God in human form. Therefore, for them any text of the Old Testament which speaks of wisdom is speaking of the reality which will later become human in Jesus of Nazareth. Please note: both they and we, their fellow Christians, are not claiming that Jesus of Nazareth was present with God at the creation of the world. But we are claiming that the Wisdom of God which will later become human in Jesus was.

The second reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans has been chosen because it explicitly mentions the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It tells us that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

In our Gospel taken from John Jesus tells his disciples that the Spirit of truth will not speak on his own but will instead take from his, Jesus', teaching, and that this teaching in turn comes from the Father. In other words, the Holy Spirit is giving us what comes from both the Father and the Son.

In the 300s a priest from Alexandria in Egypt named Arius preached that the Wisdom of God which later became human in Jesus of Nazareth was itself a creature, God's first creation, and therefore the Wisdom which became human in Jesus was itself a creature and not divine. The Church's first great council which was held in 325 in a city called Nicaea, which was not too far from the new eastern capital of the Roman Empire which Constantine, the first Christian emperor, was then building and which would bear his name, Constantinople, but is now known as Istanbul, condemned Arius' position and instead claimed that Wisdom is divine, is part of God, and not a creature, and that it is this divine Wisdom which became human in Jesus. The conclusion to be drawn from this claim is that Jesus himself is divine, is part of God, because he is the Divine Wisdom become human.

But it took another fifty years before Nicaea's teaching could prevail because some of Constantine's successors favored Arius' position, and, after all, an emperor was an emperor.

But what difference does it make? A whole lot. If the Wisdom which becomes human in Jesus is not divine but itself a creation, then we are not meeting God first-hand when we meet Jesus. God is still at a distance from us. But if this wisdom is divine, is part of

God, then in meeting Jesus we are meeting God himself. And what does it say of us that God could make us humans part of himself? It tells us that God loves us very much. It also means that we are very special stuff, a very special part of the divine creation. The Jewish scriptures share our belief that human beings are a very special part of the divine creation. We see that in psalm 8, our responsorial psalm, this morning. But Christian faith ups the ante. We are not only special, we are divine.

We began talking about something which seems to be so far removed from us, that is, the nature of God and his wisdom. But look where we end. Reflection on God and his wisdom leads us to reflection on ourselves, on who we are. And what we are told by our Trinitarian faith is that God's very own reality, his wisdom, has become and will forever remain part of us humans because it has united itself to one man, Jesus of Nazareth, and therefore to every other creature which shares this same human nature. That is very good news. That is the Gospel of Christ. And nothing can separate us from this love and from this reality of our divine nature, nothing and no one except ourselves.