

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – Trinity Sunday – 12<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

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Some people don't like to preach on the Trinity. They say it's a difficult concept to explain and to grasp. I'm not so sure. Is *God in three persons* really so hard to understand? Today's Collect read:

*Almighty and everlasting God,  
you have given us your servants grace,  
by the confession of a true faith,  
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity  
and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the Unity:  
keep us steadfast in this faith.*

So what does that mean for you? Are you one of those Christians who struggles with the idea of a triune God? Maybe you find it easier to think of God as pure Unity? Or perhaps you find one aspect of the Trinity easier to deal with than another. Some people say that they prefer to focus on the concrete details of what they know of Jesus's earthly life, that they feel his self-sacrifice so deeply that this brings them into close communion with him. Others say that they more keenly feel the presence of the Holy Spirit moving in their lives. So here is a question for all of us this morning: when we pray, who meets us in our prayers? It's important to ask this, because the images we hold in our minds and our preferred patterns of prayer can have a powerful influence on our relationship with and experience of God.

Jesus taught his followers to pray to Our Father, who art in Heaven, saying, "when you pray, go into your room, close the door and **pray to your Father**, who is unseen." *Matthew 6:6*. For some people, that's far from easy. Happily, for many Christians, praying as Jesus did, to Abba, our Father, poses no problem. I'd hope that most people's personal experience is of a kindly loving father, but for far too many, that's not the case. Dad was rarely around, and when he was, he was the one who punished the children when they were naughty – or perhaps even when

they weren't. If that's so, it might be easy to be stuck with the idea of a punitive, unapproachable god who offers no comfort. We shouldn't jump to judge too quickly those who find those words, "Our Father" difficult.

In this morning's Old Testament reading from Proverbs we have powerful images of God as the creator of our universe. Some people see God this way, rather like that famous painting of William Blake, *The Ancient of Days*. Blake's image actually represents one of several gods, Urizen, the great architect of the universe. He bends down from the clouds with a pair of compasses, drawing *a circle on the face of the deep* as the psalmist describes it. But in Blake's mythical world, this creator god is one of several gods. He's a negative figure who focusses on sin, reason and uniformity. Urizen is the creator of the *Tyger, tyger, burning bright*. He's the god who enslaves the human mind. I hope that none of us experiences God in such a negative way – but there are plenty who struggle with the idea of God, largely because they have an image of a distant being, separate from the universe and quite inaccessible. I'm sure this image of God keeps many people away from church.

Other problems can arise if we imagine God to be unattainable, an *all-powerful* creator who commands the seas and controls creation. How do we then cope with the knowledge that there are so many things that are very wrong in our world? Why doesn't God strike down the wicked? Why does he (and for some people even the masculine pronoun is a problem) allow the suffering and death of innocents? And if we see God as omnipotent, how do we interpret readings such as that from the psalm today, where we're told that we humans have been given:

*dominion over the works of your hands  
and put all things under his feet,  
All sheep and oxen,  
even the wild beasts of the field,  
The birds of the air, the fish of the sea  
and whatsoever moves in the paths of the sea.*

Do we imagine that we have a similar, all-powerful function in this world? If that's interpreted not as stewardship and caring for our home, but as having been given the right to do as we wish with our world, we're surely on dangerous ground!

But there is a very different way of experiencing God. In his book *The God we never knew*, the theologian Marcus Borg talks of a God who is “a sacred presence all around us – a reality that is ... present everywhere and permeates everything in the space/time world. God is not a being “somewhere else, (“up there” or out there, or beyond), but right here, as well as “more than right here”. This is the God who the psalmist tells us, “*created my inmost being; who knit me together in my mother’s womb.* As Psalm 139 says, “*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*” God knows us intimately – better even than ourselves. And in today’s account from Proverbs, notice that other figure imagined at the very beginning of creation:

*then I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race.*

St Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit is always present, the Comforter who *intercedes for us through wordless groans.* (Romans 8.26). When we may be struggling to put our prayer into words, the Holy Spirit is there for us. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds us to *pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.* (Ephesians 6.18).

In her *Prayer and Possibilities*, Kathryn Shirey says this:

“When I’m struggling to find the words to pray, unable to articulate my deepest prayer needs, I call on the Holy Spirit. When I’m stepping out in faith, taking a next step toward where God is calling, I call on the Holy Spirit for guidance and support. When I’m praying with others and the needs are great, I call on the Holy Spirit to intercede and help us pray.”

But of course, we’re Christians. There’s a third person in our Trinity, Jesus Christ, born as a man and understanding the reality of human life from the inside. In today’s reading from the Letter to the Romans, Paul talks of the *grace in which we stand* before God - grace obtained for us by Jesus Christ: *God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.* From the earliest days of the Church Christians have prayed to him because we know him as our Saviour. As St Paul continues: *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus*

*Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.* For many of us, praying to Jesus seems very natural. We aren't his servants, but his friends. He's our pattern, our example of how a human life should be led.

In truth, God is, ultimately, unknowable to our limited human minds. In 1 Corinthians 13 St Paul tells us, *"For now we see through a glass, darkly"*. We'll never grasp in this earthly life what is the grandeur of God, the mysterious Yaweh, I AM WHO I AM. As Marcus Borg says, *"Once we name it, we are no longer talking about it, for this reality cannot be expressed in words"*. I take great comfort in the Holy Trinity. At times, the grandeur and beauty of creation is almost overwhelming and it seems natural to give thanks and praise to this creator God who has given me life. In times of quiet contemplation, especially in the presence of natural beauty, the Spirit seems close. But so often, there is praise and deep gratitude to our Saviour with his loving, understanding human face.

Jesus taught us to go into a room, close the door and pray – but for him, sometimes that wasn't possible. He would disappear up into the hills, out into deserted places – anywhere where he might find the time, space and peace to pray. If we are to get to know God better, the important thing is to make that time and space for prayer. It might be in a quiet room, it could be in a garden or a silent place where we won't be interrupted. We might, at different times, find it easier to pray to one or another of the persons in the Trinity. This doesn't matter. What matters is making time and space for God.

To God, our Creator, the I AM who was, and is, and is to come; to Jesus Christ who has shown us the path to full humanity and life in God; and to the Holy Spirit, our Helper in whom we live and move and have our being, be all honour and glory, now and evermore. Amen.