

**Trinity Sunday 2014**

**Aston and Bampton**

**Epistle:** 2 Corinthians 13: 11 - 13

**Gospel:** Matthew 28: 16 - 20

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**The last forlorn sausage did the rounds of the long refectory table - everyone far too polite to be the one who had extra. In the end, politeness gave way to the principle of not wasting good food, and the Prior cut the banger up and distributed it to the guests on his left and on his right. Such simple, gracious negotiations are the things that create soundless laughter and delight at a monastery table, when the meal is held in silence but the human interaction is somehow deeper than mere chit-chat and table-talk can allow.**

**I had the great good fortune to spend last week on retreat at the newly-built, eco-friendly, state-of-the-art monastery of Mucknell Abbey near Worcester, where the Benedictine community who used to live at Burford Priory settled in 2010. And observing that community at work, and participating to some extent in its life - and especially in its worship - gave me food for thought (not only sausages were on offer!) as I reflected on today's readings.**

**Both our Epistle and Gospel on this particular Trinity Sunday, remind us that our peculiar Christian understanding of God has practical consequences in the way we live our daily life. Both readings are about the creation of communities that are made in the image, and through the active work of God the Holy Trinity.**

**Now, the Bible itself doesn't present us with a ready-made 'Doctrine of the Holy Trinity', of course. It took four centuries or so for the Church to meditate, debate and argue its way towards this particular outline of an understanding of the mystery of God. And the early Church Fathers whose mighty brains, and lives rooted deeply in prayer and worship, never pretended that the teaching about the Three in One and One in Three was anything more than an outline. It is a fence drawn around the mystery, they said - a *shape* of the Truth only. But a shape that makes some sense of the way the New Testament speaks about God and uses the language of Three and One, without trying to explain it.**

**Thus, today we have Paul writing in 2 Corinthians 13 about *the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion (or fellowship) of the Holy Spirit*. And he uses these words as he prays that the members of the**

**troublesome and divided Corinthian church will make up their differences and find peace and reconciliation by living in the peace of the God who is both love and peace.**

**The Gospel tells us about what is generally termed the *Great Commission* which Jesus gave to his disciples: to go and make disciples of all nations. That is, to create a community, as they themselves were a community - to create a community through baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Such a community is not simply built on the *foundation* of God, but, as baptism itself suggests, it is a community *immersed* in all that God means and involves. The unfathomable mystery of God as a Unity of Persons can, these readings suggest, be reflected in the real, down-to-earth life of human communities. And the Church, in its imperfect, stumbling way - the Church as the community of the baptized which is being formed by the unending, creative dance of the gracious Lord Jesus Christ, the loving Father and the uniting power of the Holy Spirit - is to be a model for all human life in community.**

**I've used the term 'dance' there to speak of the interweaving, delicate and beautiful relationship between the Persons of the Trinity, because (and I've said this before on several occasions) that's exactly how some of the early Fathers described it. *Perichoresis* is the Greek word, meaning to dance around one another (weave a stately Sarabande perhaps or perform one of those fast and furious whirl-about the Caller at a Barn Dance sometimes gets you to do) and this is what Father, Son and Holy Spirit seem to do - different in the way each of them actually IS God, but so at one that we can't really say where the action of one ends and another begins. It's all God, and of God - god in the mystery of his divine dancing.**

**And God draws us into the unending dance of the Holy Trinity, to be made into communities which reflect his own Community of three Persons. He draws us ever deeper into a unity which enables each of us to express and grow our unique individuality, while never doing so in isolation from others. And he helps to create a harmonious unity out of our separate identities.**

**Within the Church we have those particular communities, like the Benedictines of Mucknell Abbey - ever-varied as they have been over the centuries - communities where people of all sorts and conditions come together to live closely with one another; to dance around one another's peculiarities and annoying characteristics, to hold one another, to learn from one another, to laugh with one another. And, so, to**

**find through all the inevitable tensions and sacrifices such a way of life involves, the unity and peace which is brought to them by the God of peace and unity on whom their life is centred. Such communities are models for the rest of the Church.**

**And, as I said earlier, beyond that, the Church itself is to be a model for the world - drawing the wider world into the dance of God. ('Go and make disciples of all nations', as Jesus said to the eleven disciples in our gospel today, baptizing them into the life of the Trinity.)**

**And that's what Jesus told his disciples from the time of their calling they were to become - fishers of men/fishers of people. The Church which acknowledges and worships the God who is Three in One and One in Three is to be both a worshipping and a missionary people, whose work is to enable as many as possible to find the love, the grace and the fellowship of God in their own way and in their own place. If God is worthy of our worship, then he is also, surely, worthy of our obedience, as we try and carry out that Great Commission.**

**So, Trinity Sunday isn't just a day when we reflect on the majesty and mystery that is God - though that is vitally important. It is also a day when we link that worship with God's commission to go and make disciples, create communities in his image and enable stumbling humanity to find its feet, be lifted up out of sickness and sin, to be healed, forgiven, and to find the grace to become part of the eternal dance of the Trinity, to whom, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, be glory and praise from every creature, now and for ever. Amen.**