

Trinity Sunday

June 7, 2009

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm 29

John 3:1-17

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The world is full of people like Nicodemus. They are questioners; perhaps they may be doubters; they are certainly people who want the details, people who want all the answers to questions such as “why” and “how.” Apparently they’ve been around for a long, long time.

We have the original Nicodemus in today’s Gospel. He is a solid, dignified pillar of the community who is absolutely concrete; metaphor is completely wasted on Nicodemus. Perhaps that’s why Jesus speaks in metaphor, talks of water and wind and the spirit, stretching Nicodemus, trying to make Nicodemus think; and the response is, over and over, “how can that be?”

Which brings up an interesting question: how do you explain the wind? Even with all the maps and charts, the highs and lows and isobars, even with Jim Cantore and the Weather Channel, do we, in our modern sophistication, know where the wind comes from and where it goes? We feel it; we can see what it does – grass and trees sway, clouds move by in the sky, leaves rustle – but we cannot see the wind. We just know that it’s present.

Through the years there have been all sorts of attempts to explain the wind, or perhaps it's better to say to explain the experience of the presence of the wind, which brings us to the subject before us today, Trinity Sunday. How do you explain a Deity that is three-in-one and one-in-three?

There have been some valiant attempts. I remember a cartoon in one of the less serious journals of matters religious. A priest in the pulpit is holding up a four-leaf clover. The caption was "Too late, the rector realized he had chosen an inappropriate illustration of the Trinity."

Personally, I think the problem lies with the concept of explaining it at all. It's those Nicodemuses out there who want to nail down and make tangible something that is, in truth, a metaphor. The Trinity is like the wind. We can know its presence without explaining it. It's something to be experienced.

Have you ever noticed that God gives us no name, that God makes no attempt at self-explanation? God simply "is." We can only address what God does, and that is a major task in itself.

God is the great, omnipotent, all-knowing creator of all things for all time. The words are mine, not necessarily those of God. The problem is that we have no words or even thoughts that can encompass such a God, so we use familiar ones like "Father" and the masculine gender "He." We simply have no other way of speaking of God; God is utterly beyond our feeble human comprehension, and God knows that.

How does such a God become real for us; how does such a God become known to us in terms we can comprehend? The great creator God does so by becoming one of us, human as we are, to live and die as we do. That would be Jesus Christ, whom we call "God the Son." In Jesus God shows us first that God loves us beyond our comprehension, voluntarily putting aside Divinity to become human with all the joys and pains we all experience. And God dies as we do,

actually far more painfully than we do, to show sacrificial love, and is raised from the dead, showing that God is truly omnipotent over death itself.

Of course God, knowing our human attention span, realizes that our memories aren't really very good, that we tend to embroider and interpret things, adding our own agendas. God knows we need a reminder, and that reminder is The Holy Spirit. It's the Spirit that is present with us here and now, calling us, informing us, empowering us. It's the Spirit that, if we listen, clears away the agendas we impose and reveals to us first who and what we are and who and what God would have us be. The Spirit is like the hot, burning coal that touches the lips of the prophet Isaiah, clearing his heart and mind and filling him with the power to speak holy words to the world.

It's the Spirit that enables Isaiah and you and me, once touched, to say "Here am I; send me."

In His Holy Name.