

**THE MOST HOLY AND UNDIVIDED TRINITY**  
*a sermon preached by Fr. John-Francis Friendship SCP*  
*at S. Andrew's Church, Romford*  
Sunday, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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Isaiah 40: 12-17, 27-31  
2 Corinthians 13:11-13  
Matthew 28: 16-20

*The mystery of our creative God*  
*Loving community in the Trinity*  
*Christ commissions us to mission*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the name of the Father ✝ and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last week I had my name stolen. Well, not 'stolen' exactly, rather my identity was misappropriated by Facebook. I had been 'tagged' as the celebrant at a marriage. In Crete. Now, unless I bi-located without knowing it, this new 'face recognition' system seems to have a problem. I know I do.

Our name and our identity are fundamental. To be able to name someone is to have power over them. I could say – "you, there, in the second pew from the back", which wouldn't identify you. But if I knew your name ... I would be able to establish a relationship with you.

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, and I began this sermon invoking the 'name' of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet that isn't a name but the description of a relationship. And in that short formula is held the mystery of our faith which we imprint on ourselves as we make the Sign of the Cross. Christianity, alone of all the great world religions, proclaims that what we believe is to be understood through relationship. The God that we seek is not a far away, solitary deity whose commands we must obey but whom we cannot know.

To be in community, to believe in the primacy of relationship and to desire at-oneness with another is the way to understand something of the mystery of God. And this we affirm in that paradoxical statement: '*We believe in one God - the Father almighty, his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the giver of life*'. Every other feast – Easter, Ascension, Pentecost – concerns important aspects of the Christian Faith. Today we celebrate the *Godness* of God: the wonder of that mystery, the intimacy of God's humility and the life-giving power of the divine Spirit. Not three Gods, but one God realised in distinct ways.

Whenever I try to explain the Trinity to people I use the example of how each of us are, actually, different people. You can be a son, a brother and a father (or a daughter, a mother and a sister) and, through each of those different relationships, you will be known in different ways. Your mother will have known you very differently than, say, your son or daughter. You are a different person to your sister and to your father. And, in a sense, there *are* different people inside us and many of us struggle to be whole and integrated persons! Our very human identity is, therefore, a reflection of God – a trinity of Persons in perfect unity. Oh if that were only true for all of us! Too often, for whatever reason, we hide parts of ourselves, push them into our shadows, deny their existence, and then the different parts of ourselves struggle for a chance to live. If, as one of the saints said, to be fully human is to be divine, than to be fully human means to recognise that those different parts of our-self belong together.

Let's turn, for a few minutes, to the Trinity and try to see if we can find help there.

### **THE FATHER ALMIGHTY**

*We believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth – of all that is seen and unseen.*

That is all the Church says about our belief in God the Father. Remarkable, don't you think? Yet also quite profound. Because, in the end, the mystery of God *is* unknowable. If we could define God then that would not be God but a human construct. Whilst Western Europe, alone of the rest of the world, has almost given up on formal religion, the majority of the population still say they believe in God – or a creative power, or whatever.

And that's what we say: the God in whom we believe is to be understood as the Creator of all things. Simply that. Jews and Muslims, Hindu's and all the rest believe in the same God. If there is one God, there can *only* be one God. There's not a Muslim god and a Jewish god etc. There is one God.

### **WE BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY SON OF GOD**

But then, of course, the Creed goes on to say a lot more about Jesus. And what makes Christianity unique is that we believe that this mysterious God allowed himself to be known – not by some great and spectacular revelation but in the guise of an ordinary human being. So ordinary, vulnerable and hidden that, at the end of his life, only two people stayed with him when he died.

But the really important thing about saying that Jesus is God is that we affirm that the Creator wants to be known. It's one thing to keep God at arms' length. God on a pedestal cannot affect us – the more remote God is, the better. There *is* an otherness about God which, as the prophet Isaiah said, is glimpsed through the majesty of mountains, or the consuming blaze of fire, or the awesomeness of – love. Yet there's also an immediacy – an immanence – about him as well. And this immanence is found in Jesus. He became one with us in order that we might become one with him. That's what this Mass, of course, is all about. Becoming at-one with God through Jesus. But how do we become 'at-one' with *anyone*? Through loving commitment to the Other.

### **WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE.**

Then we affirm belief in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has been described as 'The Go-Between God' – the love which constantly flows between Father and Son. "*God*", said S. John, "*is Love*" but for there to be love there must be an object *to* love.

I could, of course, stand in front of you and have no relationship with you – you would simply be objects existing in my universe. What a terrible thought!

But, then, my heart might be full of some abstract *sense* of love, of the need to make relationships, but never do anything about it. The essence of the Trinity is that love, flowing between two persons, is the one creative force in the universe.

The Spirit who lovingly flows between Father and Son unites them perfectly and reaches out beyond itself. And that makes a profound statement about human identity. I cannot be myself without being in relationship with you. As one African thinker said: "*I am known, therefore I am.*" Isolation is madness. I gain my sense of being human, my identity as a human being, through being able to relate to others.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our Faith tells us that herein lies the essence of our identity. Our identity as a person finds its origin in the Trinity – that Divine community of Persons. The baby in the cradle has no identity other than in relationship to its parent – then, hopefully, we go on to realise our unique identity as a person.

To proclaim as our central belief that God is three and God is one is not just a theological statement. It's also a statement about what it means to be human. Our vulnerability means we need each other and, through that relationship with the other, we gain our human identity. And the final thing we need to understand is that, in the end, we are fully human when we desire God. For that same urge towards relationship, towards desiring our completeness by being at-one with the other, will always move us beyond the known to the unknown. Reach for the stars – our world is too small! Inside every human heart is a spark of God that can never be put out but can remain unknown.

If we will pay attention to it, we can set out on the path of union with God. That is the reason we are doing all this. To become open to a restlessness for union with the Divine that lies deep in the heart of each of us. And each time we make that simple Sign of the Cross we give expression to that simple need – to be at-one with the love which holds all things together.

*Amen.*