



CATHEDRAL *of the* INCARNATION

Trinity Sunday – Year A; June 11, 2017

O Trinity of Love and Power

The Rev'd Canon Bruce D. Griffith. Th.D.

One of the little-known features of this day, Trinity Sunday, the octave day of Pentecost, is that its origin is English. *Thomas Becket* (1118–70) was consecrated *Archbishop of Canterbury* on the Sunday after *Pentecost* (*Whitsun*), and his first act was to ordain that the day of his consecrationⁱ should be held as a new festival in honour of the Holy Trinity. This observance spread from Canterbury throughout the whole of western Christendom. [Wikipedia] Until recently our whole season that follows Pentecost was numbered after Trinity Sunday, so it was always featured, at least in the back of our minds.

It sometimes seems odd to have a feast which either celebrates the nature of the God we worship or the intricacies of a rather obscure set of doctrines which we have received from our earliest Christian centuries. On top of that is the long established but thankfully no longer widely observed tradition of chanting the Athanasian Creed in procession on Trinity Sunday. You can still find that document in the “Historical Documents” section of your Prayer Books on page 864f., though it has for some time been known that the document, technically known as the Quicumque Vult, is neither a creed nor written by Athanasius in the 4th century. When I was newly

ordained (late 1960's), I worked with an old priest who, around the time of WWI, had been a choirboy in the Cathedral in Dublin and who would recount with glee parts of the text which were tongue-twisters when said, let alone sung, while trying to walk in a straight line; texts such as “*For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every person by himself to be both God and Lord, so are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion, to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made by none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.*” Etc.

So, we have an English martyr archbishop who has bequeathed to us this feast which has been the downfall of more preachers than possibly any other day in the Christian year. But I am here to say to you today that it has a message for us, a message which is urgent, compelling, and vital to our fractured world. This seemingly arcane ancient doctrine over which much blood was spilled and through the development of which many found themselves exiled, including our dear Athanasius, finds its roots in the experiencing of God and I dare say in God's experience of us.

The great St. Augustine, in perhaps his greatest contribution to Christian thought entitled simply *On the Trinity (de Trinitate)*, says therein that we might think of the Trinity as the fullest expression of love: the Father is the Lover, the Son the Beloved, the Spirit the love itself. Thereby he helps us understand that it is in the very nature of God that God is a never-ceasing, eternally self-relating dynamism of pure, simple, loving unity. This “trinity”

is triune but just as surely it is one God. If you want to know what it is to be God for and in the world, in your life and in mine, in war and peace, discord and harmony, violence and tenderness, it is to be the unabashed and unashamed fully encompassing Lover of all that is. I cannot be said to love God, if I do not love my enemies, for they are as fully beloved of God as I am loved by God. Transcending all our human failings and evils is the never ceasing possibility of our triumph in God. We can be what God calls us to be, Lovers, Beloved, and purveyors of the love itself, because we have known it to walk with us and amongst us in Christ Jesus.

On this particular Trinity Sunday, as we have this week witnessed the deep division in our own country, not to mention those divisions evident in much of our world, divisions that seems to deepen as they further polarize us, perhaps even paralyze us, we are called to look yet more deeply into the life of God's Spirit, the life which is the love itself that binds three into one. Our Christian faith does not ask of us that we think or believe that it would be so fine if we could find a way to bring peace; it calls us to exercise in the world that peace which is already ours and present in that love, the dynamism of which binds God in perfect unity and opens to us the redemption brought by exercising that same love in the world. This is true "tough love".

Are we ready to stand up for the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love itself in Augustine's Trinity and say that this is not about politics, or who will pay for what, or how much is enough, or how little is enough, or what demands power must meet, or who gets to control whom, or whether our

leaders, indeed the world's leaders, are crazy or sane, evil or good, strong or weak? This moment is about acting with the strongest, most resolute love in the face of all that is evil and wrong in our world, our country, our federal, state and local governments, and our individual hearts. The rhetoric of hatred feeds the practice of hatred. It pushes us to the two edges of our divided societies, it creates terror and fear, self-righteousness and division. It will not be overcome by anything less powerful than itself; its only defeat will be at the hands that are at one and the same time loving, loved and righteous. In the words spoken just over 150 years ago, words that echo through our minds at such a time, words coming from the worst moment in our history and reminding us that power comes from the pursuit of a Trinity of ethics, that is loving, right, and good:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, . . . to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Abraham Lincoln, *Second Inaugural Address*, March 4, 1865
[assassinated April, 15, 1865]

Are we ready?

ⁱ Becket was consecrated June 3, 1162.