

Trinity II

he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him (Epistle).

It may seem a little late for a sermon on the Trinity, but any sermon worthy the name is about God, how he shows himself to us and how we respond. That said, it is an Anglican eccentricity to count sermons “after Trinity”, and a Western eccentricity to devote a feast, even if one not quite in the first rank of importance, to the subject.

It is useful to list some of the confusions, the things which we are not doing. This is not a feast of orthodoxy (unlike the Eastern Orthodox churches, which do devote a Sunday to reciting condemnations of numerous ancient errors). It is possible to go wrong about God, and to do so may harm the Christian in his or her response to God, but the remedy can wait till the problem is known to exist. Nor is this a feast about proofs of the existence of God. One certain error about God is idolatry, which is the worship of what we have made for ourselves. The “god” we had so proved would certainly neither merit nor receive our worship and obedience - only our self-congratulation. God who is does not deal in proofs, but offers himself to us on his terms, not ours. Nor is this a feast about neglected attributes of God, such as we find in the hymn “Immortal, invisible, God only wise”. These are not errors (we need to appreciate God as radically other than us as well as abiding with us), but they are not the heart of the matter.

The heart of the matter, for the early Church, was “the economy”. That was their term for God's gracious dealings with them, which revealed what man could know of God. If the Church (as people and not as a building) is the “house of God” (1 Tim. 3.15) then “economy” (which in Greek means household management) expresses how God behaves towards it.

The Gospel, viewed in that light, is only too apposite. We can decode it as the Father calling his ancient people the Jews to rejoice with him - and they would not. They had their worldly priorities instead. So in the Son he calls everybody. For the house must be filled - God's purpose in creation must not be frustrated, that man (to say nothing of the rest of the created order) should be able to worship him and delight in him.

That calling is not just in the earthly ministry of the Lord. There never was a time when the Father was without his two hands (as some early Christians put it), Son and Spirit, at work in the created order. Talk of the Trinity is not an afterthought; it is simply how the Church made sense of its own life (and of that life as a continuation of the ancient people of God and the prophetic ministry which the Holy Spirit had exercised among them).

That is why the Epistle moves so easily from talk of what we might think are mere human duties to the high mysteries of God dwelling with us and we with God. For there was never a possibility of separation. If non-Christians behave well, of course the better for them, whatever the reasons why they do so. But for us (as I understand St. John) there should be no compartmentalisation between life and worship; both spring from the same reality, which is God, Father Son and Holy Spirit in us, and we in him. This is not about feelings (don't try to make yourself experience this!) but about what is the case with us whether we notice it or not.

But God is generous, and has given us the Eucharist as a sign of his constant generosity to us and as a means of our response. It is not given to every Christian to *feel* saved; it is God's gift to us that we *are* saved and that we can together, as God's household, say Amen and receive the signs of bread and wine, so that he dwells in us, and we in him. The Gospel hints perhaps at the Eucharist, and ends in fearful warning. But for the faithful it is promise.