

Trinity XVI

that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith (Epistle).

If the Epistle reading sounds intoxicating, so be it. It is very easy to make Christianity dull - and the more so if we are on the defensive. But that is quite wrong. There are rules and there are truths; we neglect either at our peril. But mere acceptance of truths and rules is not the point.

Christianity is about how God gives himself to us, so that we can be caught up into his own life (and only incidentally and consequentially about how we attempt to give ourselves to God). That is why it is Good News, because it depends not on us earning or achieving something, but on God giving it. And what he gives is himself. That is what heaven will be about, and the promise is that this begins now - if we will have it.

How should man respond? Obviously, the atheist says this is nonsense, there is no god and nothing to share. Many others will not take the risks, or prefer a quiet life. We Christians, with all our faults, with all our doubts, with all our weakness, nevertheless leave ourselves open to God to achieve what he will in us. That is what faith, even at the lowest level, means. It is not about having right opinions about God, not about believing six impossible things before breakfast, but about trust (just as Abraham trusted). God can use our trust in him. However little it may be, he can make more of it. And he is reliable - he will do so.

Members of some other religions leave themselves open to God as they know him to achieve what he will in them. What God makes of them, I leave to God. Maybe we will understand in heaven. Maybe not. Heaven does not exist to answer our questions! We will make little progress in the faith by getting distracted into somebody else's problem – especially if that means our playing God.

But isn't Christianity essentially about sin not about relationship with God? That is debatable. Some theologians think that Jesus would have come among us even if there had been no sin - for the point of his coming is not just to restore us to an earlier innocence but to refine us with that “higher gift than grace” which is “God's presence and his very self”. Yet of course it is about sin is so far as sin is a massive hindrance. The obstacle has to be removed by God from his path for us – not because it is the important topic in itself but so that we can complete the journey.

St. Paul talks of Christ dwelling in us, St. John of all the Trinity doing so. But there is no contradiction; the one leads to the other, or indeed the two are inseparable.

How is this possible? We do not claim, if we are wise, to know God as he is - only God can do that. The most we can do is to recognise God as he has chosen to make himself known to us. And that he did in Jesus, who is completely one with the Father, God Almighty, and also completely one with us (though without sin). He is, if you will, the bridge between man and God - and a bridge is only of any use, only capable of being crossed, because it has firm foundations both sides of the river. But the bridge is built not by man's cleverness in devising a way to God, but by God's generosity in offering a way to man. So we have the opportunity to cross it.

I have already mentioned the role of faith. The practical implementation of this is that we receive Baptism “wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven”. We affirm the commitments made then for ourselves in confirmation. We are, with all our faults, in “this state of salvation”. (Quotations from the Catechism.) That give us both the right and the duty to meet together for the Eucharist, in which we are assured, “by God's favour and goodness towards us”, “that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son” and “heirs of thy everlasting kingdom”. To which bliss indeed may God in his mercy bring us.