

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

God Is Three And God Is One

You can see how the Muslim, for whom *God Is One* is a kind of mantra, would find our faith upsettingly complex. For us, who have grown up with the Trinity in the top of our minds, the doctrinal complexity serves to remind us of the mystery of a God we cannot express in human words. Even so, I can't help thinking that there is much talk about "the mystery of the Trinity" that is fatalistic and even superstitious. That *God is mysterious* doesn't mean that *God is incomprehensible!*

Mystery

We used to call trades *mysteries*, and the guilds of tailors and bricklayers and bakers were the guardians of the mysteries of their own trades. The "Mystery Plays" of mediaeval England were the property of these guilds, and not plays about mysteries. This was good use of language; the original Greek word means "hidden plan", and it refers not to our being bamboozled or mystified, but to something which is so deep that we can only get to understand it by long application (like that of an apprentice to a tradesman). Jesus was the final, complete revelation of God: he lived amongst us, and spoke with us about the Trinity, and we sensed the deep mystery of his life, and we became his pupils or apprentices, so that we might learn the mystery of being a Christian. What did he teach us by his words and his life?

Obedience

I think everyone sensed the holiness of Jesus, the fact that he was living and breathing and speaking in obedience to his Father all the time. At the same time, alongside this humility, people sensed a dignity in him which was very clear: his notion that he had a mission from God to execute, so that he spoke like an ambassador, knowing that the power of the One who had sent him was in his message. This explains the unique blend of humility and authority which stopped everyone in their tracks, even those who would eventually turn against him.

Hope

The humility of Jesus was always accompanied by a sense of the nobility of the human heart. People were worthy, he thought; he treated them as beloved children of the Father, and this meant that he lifted

them up and gave them hope and confidence in the Father's faithful love for them. *You are worth more than hundreds of sparrows*, he said: *every hair on your head has been counted*. He wanted this dignity to be expressed in a noble way of life: *you are the guest of a king*, he said: *wear your wedding-garment*. He also taught people not to accept their confusion and ignorance: *when the Holy Spirit comes*, he said, *he will lead you to the fulness of truth*.

Divine Wisdom

The wisdom of God is said to be *a friend to man*. When we say we are in the likeness of God this is what we mean. Paul daringly says of Christians: *We are those who have the mind of Christ!* What a stunning claim that is, for those of us who tremble before the Word of God! We find life in the foothills of God's mystery sometimes oppressive, because we have so much to learn, and being a disciple is endless, since we will never stop learning this infinite mystery. It isn't all excitement and uplift; sometimes it is toilsome and we are stuffy and slow, and our poor bodies are weak and disobedient and rebellious. This ungraceful state is common to all apprentices from time to time; they lose sight of their goal, and begin to waver and waste away. It is then that we need to catch the flow of the Spirit, as he streams through all that is, lifting it up to reflect its maker, making it shine with the glory of God. Today's first reading from the book of Wisdom is a meditation on this Real Presence of God in creation, and we could do worse than keep it by us as we set out on another week of learning God.

Holy Trinity

The Trinity isn't a mathematical equation or a verbal puzzle. It is a way of thinking about the relationship between Father and Son. This relationship is what we are called to share, the gift we are promised we shall enjoy. It is beyond the joy of the most joyous earthly love, and it is beyond our power to imagine or express. That is what the word *mystery* means, and why we use it of the Trinity. But we are already learning a little of what God has to offer us, and our earthly loves and friendships open our eyes and hearts to understand more and more. Our

task is to keep the highest place in our lives
open for this loving God.

Fr Philip