

I sometimes feel that most Christian congregations are in the same position as the ones in Ephesus; they have never been told there was such a thing as a Holy Spirit. The implication is quite clear: that in the beginning there were many partial accounts of the Gospel message that were extraordinarily short of the whole truth. Here are the Ephesians, having been evangelised, but having no notion of the faith that would lead to the theology of the Trinity. How then were they led to understand Jesus himself? To us it isn't comprehensible, because we can't imagine a Jesus who isn't the Son of God, isn't the second person of the Trinity, and doesn't share the Holy Spirit - who is the divine gift of life - with his Father.

That is because we have the benefit of three hundred years in the Church's life, where the theology of the Trinity was thrashed out, as the true faith was assailed and swamped by heresy after heresy, each time rising triumphantly to the surface, insisting on the divine truth that lies in the heart of Christ.

So the question Jesus puts to the disciples in the Gospel today is very dramatic. They have expressed fulsomely their confidence in him; and he responds by insisting that they were all about to have their confidence demolished, like a mud hut in an earthquake. But all this devastation has already been allowed for:

*I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me.*

Again and again Jesus tells them, *You are going to come unstuck; you are going to be opposed; you are going to suffer and be perplexed. But remember that I predicted it all, and keep your faith firm in me.* It is as if Jesus himself is the safe vessel, which will not sink, and which will preserve the heart of the Church in every trial. And that is what we have found. When those great councils met in the early Church, fighting most fiercely for their ideas and their formulations, they always found unity and peace by celebrating the Eucharist together at the end of the argument. They knew that their knowledge was imperfect and their prophesying imperfect; but they trusted in the perfection of Christ, and in the presence of Christ in the Sacraments. They knew that in the Church, which is the Body of Christ, they were infallibly at one with Christ their head. In the oneness of Christ with the Father, they knew that they already possessed the truth, even if their weakness was as yet unable to speak it clearly.

We too must hold the Church together, so that none of us becomes a branch cut off from the Vine, fit only to be thrown on the fire and burnt. We must also keep a genuine humility before each other, knowing for certain that our grasp of the truth of Jesus needs the insight and grace of all the other members of the body, even the least of them, if it is to be valid. If we become separators instead of gatherers, we shall lose a great deal in human terms; but most of all we shall lose Christ the head. In order to keep Christ, we must keep one another, and so keep his Word, and have eternal life.