



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

June 2021

My dear friends and colleagues,

The Holy Trinity. What's that all about then? This is where finite human language and finite human concepts are stretched when trying to use them to talk about the infinite majesty and mystery of God. It is important to take some time to ponder the theology and meaning of the Holy Trinity, how it can be that God is One and God is Three. But it is even more important to see how the Holy Trinity fits into our worship and devotional life – how we can relate to the Trinity.

First, where did this doctrine come from?

The Early Church came to realise that in Christ, it was not just revering a fellow human being, but worshipping God. And when the Holy Ghost came upon those first Christians at Pentecost, they discovered that the Holy Ghost was also God, and that the Spirit had to be worshipped as well. And so began a long process of thought, prayer and experience which led to the formulation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

We see the beginning of this process in the New Testament itself. One of the earliest mentions of the three Persons of the Trinity is at the end of II Corinthians, wording which is now very familiar to everyone: "The grace our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all." And at the end of Matthew's Gospel the Disciples are sent out to baptise "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost".

But the arguments about the Holy Trinity raged throughout the first four hundred years of Church history. Early Christians had experienced the power of the Holy Trinity in their worship; they knew that God was Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but they were struggling to express this in a way which allowed God to be Three, but still be One, and which allowed Jesus to be fully human and fully God. Each time someone formulated a solution, which did not protect what they felt they knew about God, that person was labelled a heretic, and thrown out of the Church – they felt it was that important.

So, by the end of the fourth century, having worked their way slowly to formulation of the Nicene Creed which orthodox Christians say every Sunday, during the first Council of Constantinople in 381 the Church felt that it had a solution which guarded all the things they wanted to say about God as Trinity. That is one of the reasons why that particular Creed has been used in worship ever since.

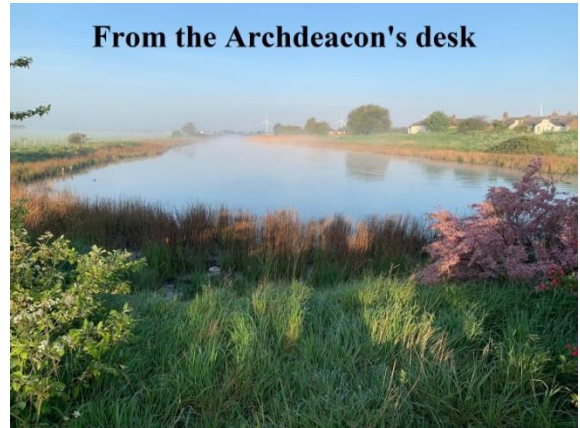
What about the experience behind that doctrine?

As we worship, we pray to the Father, through the Son, and by the power of the Holy Ghost. In all our lives and all our worship, the Holy Trinity is involved. We believe in a personal God, but He is not alone – within the Trinity there is always a constant flow of love from one person of the Trinity to the other. The love which we feel for each other and for God is reflected in the love which flows between the persons of the Trinity.

The most difficult and the most beautiful of Christian doctrines, the Holy Trinity may be difficult to understand, but possible to experience, as we direct our prayer to the Father, through the Son, and by the power of the Holy Ghost who prays in us. We don't have to understand it, we can't understand it, we only have to try to live it, as the early Christians did.

With every blessing

Fr. Raymond Thompson



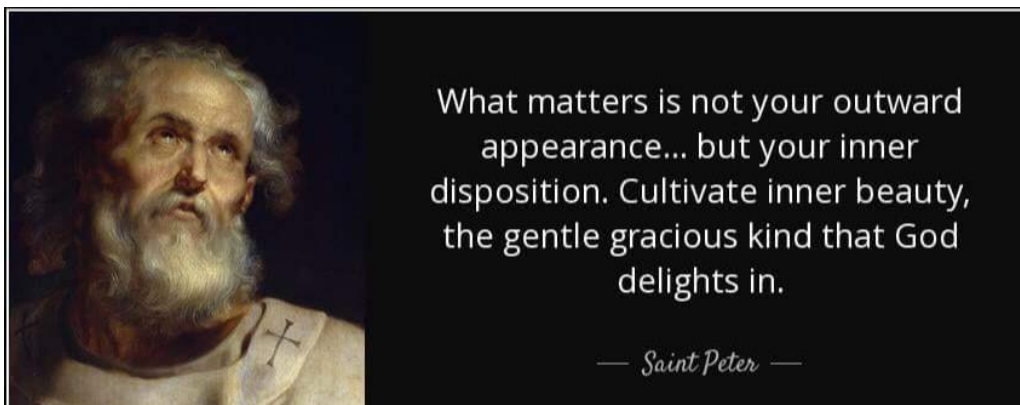
With a voice of singing

“With a voice of singing, declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 48:20)

One of the hardest things for many church-going folk to accept during this past year-and-a-quarter has been the prohibition on singing during services. It is a very natural instinct to want to use the voice that God has given us to sing His praises. Of course, not everyone has been blessed with the gift of a fine singing voice, but whether your “voice of singing” consists of a rather gravelly and out-of-tune growl or a splendid operatic delight or something in between is of no consequence to He Who created you as you are. What we can offer is the best of what we have been given.

But to have such a gift and to lose it can feel very much like a bereavement. Many of you know that some eleven years ago I underwent an operation to remove a very large tumour from within my chest which would have suffocated me within a few months if it hadn't been discovered by one of the world's top cardio-thoracic surgeons. My case was completely unique and I became the subject of some seminars and several published articles around the globe. Unfortunately, fame aside, this surgery resulted in the total loss of my voice. Having spent most of my life singing in choirs (church and school), and operatics, and having what was considered to be a decent tenor voice, I now found myself unable even to speak. For 15 months I could only communicate via a whisper, and at events where family or friends were gathered the inability to verbally communicate resulted in my giving up and retreating into a quiet corner. It was a strange sort of isolated exclusion. Due to the skill of a surgeon expert in throat surgery I was able to have a reasonable amount of voice restored but, because of the physiology, I had to accept that I would never be able to sing well again, and that my speaking, reading and preaching voice was permanently very much diminished. This sometimes results in my being on the receiving end of impatience and unkindness from those who are hard-of-hearing and, having no understanding of the issues, find it difficult to clearly hear me. The effort involved in trying to overcome the affliction is quite exhausting and frustrating, and this is surely a lesson to us all that we often do not understand that many have personal physical limitations that we usually know nothing about. Making judgements about people is best left to He who knows us.

But however small the gift or talent we have for making song, the Lord loves the sound of our voices and to Him even the most tone-deaf person's vocals are equal to the angelic choirs. For far too long our churches were closed for worship and, whilst we have since been able to enjoy listening to organ and instrumental music and the singing of a cantor or small singing group, our own voices lifted in song is an offering of worship that has been mostly denied us. The earliest Biblical reference to singing God's praises is in Exodus 15. The last is, I believe, the recalling of that same canticle of Moses in Revelation 15:3, with dozens in between, so the role of singing in worship has impressive historical pedigree. We have some catching up to do after the expected lifting of restrictions on singing. Let us use whatever vocal ability we have, however minimal it might seem to us, to send up our praises to the highest heavens.



(My “desk picture” is always an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)