

ADDRESS**22 May 2016****Trinity Sunday**

Proverbs 8. 1-4, 22-31	Wisdom
Psalms 8	The glory of God
Roman 5.1-5	Peace with God
John 16.12-15	The Spirit of truth

Open our minds, O Lord, to hear and to understand your Word, and open our hearts to do your will. We ask in Jesus' name. AMEN.

I have been invited to give my 6th annual Trinity Sunday address. A few of you have been most helpful in suggesting what I might say -- maybe you were thinking that everything that could be said about the Trinity had already been said. Of course, it hasn't and probably never will, as scholars and mystics and other people of prayer continue to explore the mystery of the Godhead.

Several of you kindly suggested that I should simply repeat what I said last year, or the year before, or the year before that. 'No-one will remember', they said helpfully, and that is one of the sad things about sermons – they take days or even weeks to prepare, and 15 to 20 minutes to deliver, though some preachers sometimes take longer, and they take five minutes to forget.

So here is a test for us all – Bishop Lin was here three weeks ago to help us celebrate St Mark's Day. What did he say to us? . . . Will you still remember that much next year, on St Mark's Day? Or in six years' time? If you forget, you can always check it out on our website.

Today's readings follow on from those we heard last week, when we celebrated the feast of Pentecost. They tell us about the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Wisdom, the Comforter, the third person of the Trinity, the One whom some theologians call the Forgotten God.

Several years ago a visiting American preacher told the congregation of St Andrew's cathedral that Sydney diocese had its own Trinity, the trinity of 'Father, Son and Holy Bible'. Philip Jensen, who was then the dean, took umbrage – he saw the comment as an intended insult, one that was meant to offend. But, as he thought about the preacher's message, he realised there was discomfiting truth in it, and several weeks later, he began a series of sermons on Jesus' teachings on the Holy Spirit, warning his people against limiting their spiritual lives by neglecting what some theologians call the forgotten God.

That's the title of a new book by the American preacher Francis Chan, who says that, *"Most of us would...choose a physical Jesus over an invisible Spirit. But what do we do with the fact that Jesus says it is better for His followers to have the Holy Spirit?" Do we believe Him? If so, do our lives reflect that belief?"* Chan is quoting from the Gospel according to John, a few verses before today's Gospel reading.

When you look at the websites of the parishes in our diocese, you find that most of them have no mention of the Holy Spirit. Some of them only mention Jesus, the Son; they say nothing about God the Father, or God the Spirit. Our mission statement is not on our website, at least I can't find it, but it is printed at the top of the second page of *Connections*. It proclaims that *St Mark's is a community of faith where people can grow in their relationship with God through Jesus Christ in an atmosphere of acceptance, trust and non-discrimination*. No mention of the Holy Spirit. Does that mean that this parish honours a duality, not a Trinity?

The website of St James' King St does not mention the Father **or** the Spirit. It says simply that *The Parish is an open and inclusive Christian community that seeks to live out the good news of Christ through its many activities . . .*

The website of the very different parish of St Paul's Carlingford has the same exclusive focus on Jesus. It says *At St Paul's Anglican we're all about Jesus and the real hope his death and resurrection brings. Inspired by our trust in Jesus and his love for us all, St Paul's is a place to grow, share, serve and worship Jesus together.*

On a wet Sunday afternoon, you might like to click on the websites of any number of our parishes and see what they say their mission is; see how few of them acknowledge the Holy Spirit. Most of them mention only two Persons of the godhead, some only one. They say they are *Jesus people*, or that in their church, "*Jesus is communicated, celebrated and demonstrated*".

Unlike many parishes, St Andrew's cathedral has both a vision statement **and** a mission statement. The vision statement is simply, *To see Christ honoured as Lord and Saviour in every community*; no mention of the Father or the Spirit; but the mission statement does honour all three persons of the Trinity: *We commit ourselves afresh, in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, to glorify God and love our neighbour by proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ, calling people to repent and living lives worthy of him*. That is truly Trinitarian.

So, what do today's readings tell us about the Holy Spirit? The ancient text of the Proverbs speaks about the Spirit as the Spirit of Wisdom, the Spirit that proceeded from the Father before time began, the Spirit which moved over the face of the waters as the world was created, to use the poetic language of the book of Genesis.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Wisdom, was more highly honoured in the early centuries of the church than it is today. One of the great experiences of our lives was to visit the ancient Church of the Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia, in Istanbul. For centuries it was the largest and grandest church in the world, until the city was conquered by the Ottomans in 1453. It was converted into a mosque and then became a museum, but many of the golden mosaics which tell

the Christian story have now been uncovered and preserved, to give us some idea of what the great church looked like for around 800 years before the Muslim conquest.

In Aramaic, the language which Jesus used, the word for Spirit is feminine, so the Holy Spirit has sometimes been called the feminine aspect of God. When God created us male and female, he was creating us in his own image. This could suggest that, in the most spiritual of ways, women may be wiser than men. I won't go there.

In today's New Testament reading, Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as the channel through which God's love is poured into our lives. If we neglect the Spirit we may be limiting the power of the love of God in our lives – we may be less loving, less caring, less able to fulfil our duty to God, less able to love him with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength, and less able to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Our brief reading from the Gospel according to John is a few verses from the long discourse which Jesus is recorded as giving at the Last Supper after Judas had left the room to betray him. The Spirit of Truth is the Messenger of God, the glorifier of Jesus, the one who continues the mission of Jesus, by declaring God's message to us, if we are ready to listen.

So why do so many Anglicans, so many Christians, neglect this person of the Trinity? Some scholars have suggested that it is because of the excesses of the charismatic movement which came to Australia in the 1960s, creating new mega churches and new fervour in all the mainstream denominations.

I remember being invited to a charismatic service in a Catholic church in Rockhampton when I was teaching at the University there. Those who wanted to be filled with the power of the Spirit came to the altar rail, and as the priest blessed each of them they fell backwards on to one of the nuns standing behind them. As one nun said to me, 'It's a long while since I held a man in my arms'.

Without giving way to this unAnglican enthusiasm, we need to ensure our faith is complete, by honouring all three persons of the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal, as one of the ancient creeds says, and recalling the multiple roles the Scriptures tell us that the Holy Spirit can play in our lives. Let me remind you of a just a few of them:

The Spirit is the **power of God**. Acts 1 verse 8 reminds us of this -- this is Jesus' promise on the day of his Ascension: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.* We all want to have more power over our own lives, more control over our destinies. .

Sick people testify that the Spirit gives them power over pain; troubled people testify that the Spirit gives them power over depression and anxiety; arrogant people testify that the Spirit gives them

power to control their ambition and their greed; the whole book of Acts bears witness to the power of the Spirit to bring people to accept God as their Father and Jesus as their Saviour. We don't know exactly how this happens, we don't know why it does not happen to everyone, but we know that it does happen, in God's own time and God's own way.

Second, the Spirit is our **channel of God's love**; it frees us from self and enables us to love God and to love and serve our neighbours. As Paul puts it, in his letter to the Romans, chapter 5, verse 5: *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.* Poured into our hearts, not just a sprinkle, not just a teaspoonful, but an abundance, enough to help us love even people who are unlovable, enough to enable us to pay the price of love.

Third, the Spirit is our **teacher**. John's Gospel tells us this, in another part of this long address of Jesus to his disciples, chapter 14, verse 26: *The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.* When we reach a time of decision in our lives, we will often recollect a message or a challenge from the Scriptures which will help us make the right choice. These days, when we can't remember the exact words or where they come from, we can simply Google what we can remember and be given the exact reference. The Spirit and Google become allies in teaching us how to live.

Fourth, the Spirit is our **Advocate**, our *parakletos*, our partner in prayer. The same verse in John's Gospel tells us this, so does Paul when he writes to the church in Rome, chapter 8, verses 26 and 27, *the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. . . . the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* So the Spirit becomes our partner in prayer, helping us put our prayers into words, praying with us to the Father through the Son that God's will might be done in our lives, as it was in the earthly life of Jesus.

Fifth, the Spirit is our **Comforter**, our consoler. This is another meaning of the Greek *parakletos*, the Spirit is our consolation in times when we are ill, the God at our bedside, our comfort in times of sadness, in times of loss, in times when we wonder why other people seem to have so few problems, and we have so many. The Spirit is our comforter, our reassurer, when we know we have done wrong – the first letter of John reminds us of this, in chapter 2, verse 1.

So, on this Trinity Sunday, let us remember the forgotten God, let us rejoice in the Holy Spirit as God's gift of himself to us, and honour the fullness of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, looking forward to our resurrection and the life of the world to come. Let us pray continually to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit and God will fully answer our prayers, in the ways that are best for us. *Lord, hear our prayer*