Trinity Sunday, St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin June 7th 2020

Sermon for Mattins on Trinity Sunday

Genesis 1.1: *In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.*

While the opening chapter of Genesis may seem repetitive and may seem also to have been superseded by the developments of both science and cosmology, it has its clear benefits to offer on Trinity Sunday 2020. Not only, in its own Priestly Code context, does it introduce us to a poetic and a painterly view of creation, it also, in our current pandemic context, introduces us to the idea of a fresh start. Battle-weary as many of us are, the idea of a fresh start has its attractions as repetition and predictability have become very much a feature of Lockdown. But we must never forget that for others this is a time of loss and terror, of grief with no real grieving and of silence with no real comforting. One person’s boredom is another person’s tragedy.

In these times that are dark and dangerous, when ironically the evenings are long and the daylight persistent, if we train our eyes and our ears: there is a fresh start for us; there is a fresh start for each day; and there is a fresh start for the creation itself. People have seen and heard nature as never before in their lifetime. Children, who are able to get out and about with their parents and guardians, can observe colours and changes in gardens and parks, and in the sea which surrounds you if you live by the coast with all of its dazzling brilliance, such that neither they nor their parents would have bothered to look at once, let alone twice, until recently. They were just always there. The opportunity to walk more gives a sense of each new day starting in a very intentional and focused way. None of us has any real idea as yet what the country will look like after COVID 19. That too is brand new and yet to unfold for us.

But there are some specific things that the writer of Genesis says about God that we need to hold fast, placed as we are now in the early Recovery Phases of Reopening Ireland. Every day in the Biblical account has its own course and every day comes to an end. Every day is declared: *good* by God. At the end of the six-day cycle, God *rested from all the work that he had done in creation.* Rest and a change of emphasis even for God is part of creation. And, on every day, something different happened. The challenge to our own losing control of almost everything we used to control, on account of the coronavirus, is threefold: the goodness of creation; the built-in rest and relaxation ascribed to God and recommended to us as sabbath; and the diversity of each day as we live it and it lives itself – something different is created daily. Goodness, rest, diversity – these can be a trinity of getting to grips with ourselves, with others and with the world around us that we can take from Trinity Sunday 2020.

Perhaps we sometimes wonder how and why we understand God as Three in One and One in Three. Before we dismiss ‘the doctrine of the Trinity,’ churchpeople fought long and hard in the early centuries of the church for its orthodoxy. And orthodoxy is an interaction of Scripture, Creed and Tradition lived organically in each generation of Anglicanism. Christianity is not simply all about Jesus. Christianity takes the idea of a single God, one God, from the Judaism to which is remains forever bound. We are not superior to Judaism. Seven million people at a certain point in twentieth-century history owe their death to those who thought Christianity was superior – and countless numbers throughout the rest of history before and since. In what we call The Old Testament we see from time to the time the operation of the Spirit of God; we see also the operation of the Wisdom of God. It is not that Judaism saw these as independent persons of the single God; Judaism had fought hard for the One God who was their Father. They did nonetheless see them as definitive and authoritative expressions of the one God.

The doctrine of The Trinity can be viewed as a way of seeing faithfully, of piecing together faithfully and of holding together faithfully the defining personal aspects of God: the Father oversees and plans the interventions in the creation for the benefit of its inhabitants but even he cannot prevent the free life of the vegetative, animal and human life of the members of the creation once he has created them;

the Son who becomes human while never ceasing to be divine and lives a life of teaching and healing and dying and rising on earth makes the all-important connection for us between what we see and what we do not see, in the words of the prayer for which his followers asked him: *on earth as it is in heaven, in heaven as it is on earth*;

the Spirit, who participates in the baptism of Jesus by John in the River Jordan and who catapults the disciples out of their huddled fear after the Resurrection and Ascension, enables them in their context and us in our context to become the engine-room of spreading the goodness of God and the glory of creation worldwide through belonging to The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (see St Matthew 28.16-20).

In the time of COVID 19, this is not simply what we read and what we hear in Holy Scripture. It is what we do. This is the gift of God the Holy Trinity we must offer to the people of God’s creation day by day: in our actions; in our attitudes; in our positivity in the face of the negative; and in our compliance with The Guidelines for Reopening Ireland every bit as much as it was in our compliance with The Guidelines for Lockdown Ireland. This cathedral stands as an invitation to the exercise of such gifts in the name of St Patrick who, we are told of long standing, set out the doctrine of The Trinity to the people of Ireland by means of the shamrock: a simple plant, an expression of God’s creation; three leaves with a single energy connecting it to the earth to which we all belong and on which we all depend. The image holds to this day. It is recognized worldwide as the symbol of Ireland; it voices our faith and creed.

St Matthew 28.19, 20: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*