

TRINITY SUNDAY 2020

Jesus said to Thomas, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied."

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

I have always loved that conversation between Jesus and his disciples during the last supper, and reckon it is a pretty good starting point for thinking about the Holy Trinity.

Jesus had been explaining to his disciples some of the most basic stuff about how they should live and behave. It all centred on the fact that they were his friends. Friendship, a deep unanimity of mind and heart was a central feature of their relationship with him and with each other, and, following from that, a central feature of the church which they were sent to plant in all the four corners of the world.

But Philip seems to want more and said to Jesus, *"Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied."*

Jesus replied: *"Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and still you do not know me? To have seen me is to have seen the Father, so how can you say, 'Let us see the Father'?"*

We can easily miss what Jesus actually said because we don't have "thees" and "thous" in modern English and the word "you" is both singular and plural. Listen to how the King James Bible translates it: *"Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and still thou hast not known me?"*

Do you see it? Jesus and his friends had all been together pretty well constantly for three years - *"I have been with you"* in the plural, all of them together. But to Philip, this plural becomes singular, *"and still thou hast not known me?"* (you personally, Philip, what about you?)

Every human being has the opportunity to know and believe in God. It's part of being human, perhaps the most human thing of all about us. What Jesus seems to be saying is he's here for all of us, but each one of us has to respond. Nobody else can do it for us. Somebody very wisely once said, God doesn't have any grandchildren, only sons and daughters.

Anyway, back to the conversation between Jesus and Philip. Jesus said, *Have I been with you all this time Philip still thou hast not known me.*

Philip had asked Jesus to show God to him. Everybody wants to see and know God - even if it appears as a vague longing to know whether there is God, any ultimate meaning, at all - but how could such a thing be possible?

Well, as Christians we do of course believe that God has already shown himself to us in Jesus.

Jesus' teaching, his miracles of healing, his compassion for the crowds; it's all there in the Bible for us to read. But that's not enough. It is not reading about Jesus, not even believing what we read, that counts, but knowing, Jesus, being with him - or, to pick up some of his other words to the disciples at the Last Supper, "abiding in him."

Close to Jesus means close to God. Even though we cannot even see Jesus like Philip did, God's Holy Spirit makes Jesus present with us in all sorts of ways: when we love and serve other people in his name, when we read the Bible, when we pray, when we turn back to him in sorrow for our sins and ask his forgiveness, and above all, in the Holy Eucharist where he gives himself to us as food for our souls and bodies (even if at the moment our communion have to be virtual and spiritual rather than sacramental.)

Remember, Jesus did not say, "to have seen me is like having seen God". In other words, also from St John: *No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.* (Jn 1.18)

So being close to Jesus, we meet his Father, that is, God, the creator of everything: God the all-mighty, the all-loving, without whom nothing at all exists. We also receive the gift of his Spirit - that ever-living, always moving power who helps us to live the way we should.

But there is something more. Jesus commissioned his disciples, *Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.*

This makes no sense at all if it was only a promise to his first disciples. After all, Jesus himself also prayed not only for these but also for those who will believe in him because of their words,

Do you get the point? Philip asked to see God the Father nearly 2000 years ago. He got the surprising answer that to have seen Jesus is to have seen the Father. All the disciples - and we - then got the even more surprising answer that all through the ages people will see God in what they see in us, the disciples of Jesus Christ, the members of his body, made one with him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Isn't that wonderful? But what a high responsibility, to make sure that we live our lives as individuals and as parish communities in a way that genuinely does help other people to see God.