

Trinity Sunday (B)
(Deuteronomy 4:32-34.39-40 / Matthew 28:16-20)
Relationships

Mother Teresa of Calcutta considered loneliness as one of the greatest diseases in Western society. A recent document from the Office of National Statistics reveals that almost 10% of people aged 16 to 24 are “always or often” lonely - the highest proportion of any age group.

We all have experienced the longing for relationship in love or in friendship, the desire to exist and be important for another person, to know that somebody is physically present to us, there with us and there for us.

This longing cannot be diagnosed only as a symptom of a psychological disease. It is an echo of God’s words at the beginning of creation: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gn 2:18). It is part of God’s design for us to be in relationship, to become who we are called to be through relationships.

At a deeper level, our longing for relationship is rooted in the fact that we are made in the image and likeness of a God who is relationship. Our Trinitarian God is a relationship between three Persons. So when we long for relationships, we want to reclaim our own identity as men and women created for relationships.

The contemplation of the Trinity is an occasion for us to learn how we should relate to one another, what our communities and families are called to imitate in order to bear witness to the life-giving power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Presence and relationship are central to all reflection on the Trinity. The last words of our Gospel reading, which are the last words of St Matthew’s Gospel, sum up what the whole New Testament is about: the revelation of a God who loves us so much that he chose to be present to us by becoming one of us in Jesus Christ. But that is not all, God’s presence went a step further by coming and dwelling in our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is not an abstract reality that we celebrate once a year and then forget about for the rest of the time. The Trinity is imprinted upon us and written within us; it is a perpetual reminder that we are made for relationships and dialogue, for real and respectful presence to one another.

Today we hear a lot about internet relationships, online presence management or online relationships. In this context, the words *presence* and *relationship* have lost their true meaning, they do not qualify what a true human relationship is. I do not mean that they are necessarily bad but we must be clear about the fact that they are pale substitutes for what we really need and truly long for.

What social networking sites provide are “no risk relationships” whose goal is just to stave off loneliness. There are no risks because as there is no face-to-face, the partners of the so-called relationship remain in control of their feelings, reactions and the information they share.

It is through our real presence to one another, through face-to-face encounter that we reveal our true identity and are able to establish life-giving relationships.

Are real relationships only a challenge for society? We must be honest and acknowledge that our way of relating to God and to one another in our Christian communities is not always in accord with what we believe about God and the Trinity.

Very often, our God looks like a monolithic and solitary figure, an old bearded white man lost in the clouds vaguely concerned by what happens in human lives. This image of God is not without benefits for us, it is a good way to keep God's at arm's length, to prevent him from interfering too much with our decisions and our way of living.

Moreover, this vision of God does not compel us to relate to one another as brothers and sisters. A solitary God does not challenge our individualism.

On the contrary it creates Christians who are not concerned about what is happening beyond the small circle of people they like and are focused on their personal salvation, Christians who have boxed God into the Sunday Service and live the rest of the week without paying much attention to him and/or to others.

The late Indian Orthodox archbishop Paulos Mar Gregorios gives a clear summary of what our Trinitarian faith is: "God is a community of three Persons united in a mutual love. (...) It is from the overflow of this mutual love that the creation has come into being, and humanity has appeared on earth. (...) The church, the body of Christ, is to exist on earth, as an expression, however imperfect it may be, of the community of love that God is." (*The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 63).

The church is to exist as an expression of the community of love that God is. Is that how it is? How would we qualify our relationships here in the Catholic Church and between our different denominations? As Christians, do we relate to one another in love? Do we reflect the quality of love and relationship that is at the heart of the Trinity?

At the moment, our diocesan Church is going through a difficult time, where tensions between laity and laity, laity and clergy, clergy and clergy are palpable, it is surely necessary to deal with the real problems that exist but it is also necessary to remain faithful to what our faith is all about.

The challenge we are facing is also about the way we relate to the world. What is overflowing from the life of our communities? Is it anger, frustration and judgment, or is it respect and love? Do our communities show to the world that real relationships matter, that true presence to one another matters? Do we show to our contemporaries that our God is open to dialogue and diversity?

As Christians, may we grow in our love and knowledge of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May we be communities of love, where relationships blossom in an atmosphere of trust and respect.