

Trinity Sunday – St Peter’s, Brighton Beach – 4 June 2023

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The Lord’s Prayer is familiar to us all. In it we address God as “Our Father”. Yet how often do we stop to consider the Trinitarian dimensions of this prayer?

There is the key role of Jesus, of course, since he taught the prayer in response to a request by his disciples. What’s special about this is the ‘inside track’ it gives us into the mystery of God. Having emptied himself to become human, Jesus draws us, his fellow human beings, into his intimate relationship with God by allowing us too, to address his Father as “*Our Father*”. St Paul picks this up in his Letter to the Galatians where he writes:

"The proof that you are his children is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries 'Abba, Father', and it is this that makes you God's child."

Enter the Holy Spirit into the Trinitarian dynamic of the Our Father. To pray the Our Father in faith and total sincerity is a grace and a prompting of the Holy Spirit. We pray to the Father inspired by the Holy Spirit and taught by Jesus. No one would have dared call God a loving “*father*” until Jesus showed us the way to do so. Furthermore, we are formed by divine teaching in this – the role of the Holy Spirit. “*The Spirit will lead you to the complete truth, ... will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you*”, says Jesus.

The Lord’s prayer as we know it in English today has become rather set in concrete since the St James translation of the Bible 500 years ago. Fair enough, the version is familiar, ecumenical, and universally known – and there’s good in that. The downside is that we lose something of the intimacy of the original language, Aramaic, in which Jesus prayed it; his mother tongue.

Jesus would have begun by addressing God: “*Abwoon d’bashmaya*.” Abba in Hebrew is Father, but the Aramaic dialect adds “*woon*” – an allusion to a mother’s womb. For the people of that culture, creation is inconceivable without both feminine and masculine principles. Abwoon cannot really be translated into English. It requires a faith-sense of the Creator God as a ‘birthing parent’.

Aramaic scholars point out that the word Abwoon is so all-embracing with layers of meaning can possibly be translated as "*Oneness-Creative-Parenting-Flowing-Lifegiving.*"

The expressed idea may be new to some, even confusing. But before the mystery of God, we must humbly accept that human words are limited, that we are in the presence of an incomprehensible mystery, and that all we need for a Trinitarian faith is to copy Jesus, "*the image of the unseen God*" who, in the unifying love of the Holy Spirit, called God "Abwoon".

This is not to say other poets and writers haven't attempted to contextualise, articulate and unpack the concept and experience of the Holy Trinity.

In the human heart is a thirst of infinite proportions, but most of the time we don't realise that. Suffering is one experience that can bring us in touch with our thirst, with the longing and yearning that echoes in the voids of our hearts. The poet William Wordsworth calls it:

*"Those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things."*

A poet of our own time, Mary Oliver, in her poem called *Thirst*, puts it this way: "*Another morning and I wake with thirst / for the goodness I do not have.*" Then, plumbing her inner emptiness, she realises that she has nothing "*...except the / prayers which, with this thirst, / I am slowly learning.*"

In her poem, *Praying*, Oliver develops the idea that prayer is letting go of our noisy words and learning to be still and listen for the gentle whisper of God, saying of prayer that:

*"This isn't
a contest but the doorway
into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak."*

Back to the Gospel, St Paul says the same when he teaches that prayer is an action of the Spirit dwelling within us, enabling us to call God "*Abba*", - Father praying within us "*with sighs too deep for words*".

The Welsh poet, R.S. Thomas, struggling with his own quest for faith, wrote a poem called *Kneeling*. He too calls on God to take the initiative:

*"Prompt me, God....
When I speak
... something is lost.
The meaning is in the waiting."*

The meaning is in the waiting. How true of our theology and our understanding of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity! Our words get in the way. Our words are inadequate. We can barely find the words to express the longings of our hearts, the emptiness of our lives. Ecclesiastes calls it all "*vanity and chasing the wind*". Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely in our learning the language of the heart, of our gradual improvements in interpreting its meaning, in our humble waiting, that we move towards deeper faith in the Mystery of all Mysteries: God is Love, God is Communion, God is Trinity.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, says that faith is not just something that we believe, but something that we live or that we do. Technically this is called the complementarity of 'orthodoxy' and 'orthopraxis'. It applies to every item of the Creed, including faith in the Trinity. We must therefore live what we believe.

If God is a communion of persons, then we must live in communion with all God's creatures, not just with other human beings but with all of creation. If God is Love, then we must live by love, in love and for love. True, we can throw up our hands and say, "It's beyond me!" But that too is part of the equation, part of our gradual growth and transformation into the Mystery in whose image and likeness we are created. Like these words scribbled on a piece of paper during a retreat:

I yearn for a Father who often feels absent.
For a Jesus who sometimes seems but a memory.
But I sense a Spirit in this very yearning.

Such is the divine mystery of the Trinity.

Amen.