

Trinity Sunday 19th June 2011

St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem

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Isaiah 6.3: *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.*

I simply do not know what it is like in the diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East in this regard, but in both my previous diocese and now in my new diocese the question of red or white as the liturgical colour for Confirmation was a point of careful scrutiny and consideration. My own mind on this is quite clear and my thinking is as follows. Red points us to the Holy Spirit – and therefore takes us into the wonderful weave of the seven-fold gifts of the Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgement and inward strength, the spirit of knowledge and godly living and the spirit of reverence for the Lord. White points us to the Holy Trinity, to baptism and to the Creed as the foundational expression of Christ-like being and belonging. In the Church of Ireland service the Profession of Faith comes immediately before the confirmation with the laying on of hands and the bishop requests the whole community gathered before God: *Brothers and sisters, I ask you to profess together with these candidates the faith of the Church.* The Creed of Baptism is recited in response to three deliberate and direct questions: Do you believe and trust in God the Father? Do you believe and trust in God the Son? Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit?

And by now you will have guessed that my preference is for white because it enfolds the totality of the Trinity of God and in so doing sweeps up the particular charisms of the Spirit of God into the creativity and providence of the Father and into the humanity and divinity of the Son without in any way depriving us of the fire and the energy of the Spirit. And it roots confirmation in baptism – which is and always will be where it belongs.

In a place such as Jerusalem, none of you needs me to tell you how much hammering went into the development and the agreement of the doctrine of the Trinity. To many people in the contemporary church this is something of little concern. Our doctrinal focus seems to have shifted elsewhere - and sadly to have stuck there - and we rather take for granted the fundamentals of our faith as if they somehow just arrived like the letters in the post. The failure to recognize as real the energy and the passion - theological and personal - which have given us the statement of our faith in this way is alarming not least because our generation is one which takes the best for granted and assumes it as a norm. But, as any of us knows from our life from day to day: nothing simply happens, things have to be made to happen, if they are to happen at all. So, the names of Athanasius, of the Cappadocian Fathers, of Cyril and Nestorius and of others ought not to be forgotten or sidelined on Trinity Sunday as we, in the words of the Collect for today, *acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty worship the Unity.*

The earlier part of that same Collect expresses our dependence on God for this. It is from God that we receive grace and through grace that we make confession of a true faith and through such faith we acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty worship the Unity. The sequence is clear - grace, confession, faith and acknowledgement of glory and

power – and it has an architecture which can be as simple as it can be complicated. God's gift of God's self to us leads us to voice our praise of God and our belief in the validity of this gives us scope to make public the glory and the power of God who does and will continue to be a source of glory and power to others. God always goes ahead of us wherever our path takes us. God always is there whenever we arrive. That exuberant account of creation which is our Old Testament Lesson today makes this abundantly clear. There is no part of the creation which lies outside the being and the belonging of God. As God gives us belonging to God, so God gives us belonging to everything else God has created.

You may wonder why orthodoxy matters so much. It matters precisely because for us to know what is right teaching enables us to engage effectively with those of a Faith other than our own. There is no guarantee whatsoever that this encounter will be straightforward – indeed as Christian people in the Land of the Holy One know well, such encounters can be painful, frustrating and unpleasant. You need to know that the international world hears your cry and does not forget you. Knowing what you believe and knowing why you believe it is costly to you but the continuing witness of the people of the Land of the Holy One and their modelling of Inter Faith generosity and hospitality is an inspiration, forged in suffering and in glory, to the whole world of faithful encounter. Orthodoxy has at least two meanings: right worship and right teaching. Orthodoxy leads and guides us into orthopraxis – right action in the ways of both morality and mission. As the presence of God in our midst comforts and revives us, so God's presence also stimulates and drives us forward to live good lives for others and for God. In this way, there is the dimension of right action in our response to the gracious giving of God. Morality on its own is not enough and never can be. It needs the framework and the discipline of mission if it is not to get lost in the small print as so often is the way with morality and the expectations which people so often impose on other people more than they do on themselves. As the Father sent the Son, so the Son and the Spirit send us to be godly and to be God-like. The invitation by the Risen and Ascended Jesus to the disciples to go and to make disciples of all nations is an invitation to make communities of faith in the spirit of the Holy Trinity wherever people live sharing with them values of goodness and generosity and encouraging them in turn to send out others in the same name and in the same cause.

To those of us whose privilege it is to be here in the Land of the Holy One as Members of the Commission of the Archbishop of Canterbury with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, it is a great pleasure to worship here in St George's Cathedral and to spend time with our sisters and brothers here in Jerusalem. For us a visit to Jerusalem always feels like a return to a home where we sense that we belong and where we receive welcome. This year the focus and the content of our study have been the psalms and their role in worship. One of the themes which we have explored with the rabbis and which matters greatly to us as Christians and as Anglicans as we witness to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in this place and in the world today is the range of human and divine experience to which the psalms give voice and expression. The instinct which the psalmist has to look for and to find God in the darkest of places, the capacity to hold God before his face even when that face is at its most downcast and to modulate from confession of sin to confession of praise is a way of spiritual being which many of us have lost sight of today. The economic collapse and the subsequent pressures on the economies of the West, built as they are on the expectation that spending is and must be a way of life have brought those of us who live there to a position where we laugh much less than we used to, we celebrate much less than we

ought and we see our blessings less and less in the face of our difficulties. We recognize also that the good times as we once knew them will not return in our lifetime and we are fearful for our children. It is therefore such a pleasure to be here in Jerusalem and in the heart of the tension which is such a sustained feature of life here to be with people who can and do rejoice. This is an inspiration which we bring back to our countries and to our churches as we rejoice with you as you rejoice in life itself.

The Service of Confirmation was where I began. The confirmation and strengthening of faith is where I wish to conclude. Every expression and experience of worship gives voice to the Trinity and the Unity of God. God in Three Persons holds us in the creativity of the creation itself. God in Three Persons calls each one of us to follow right thought into right practice and to be brothers and sisters to all those whom God has created in God's image and likeness.

St Matthew 5:7: Blessed are those who show mercy; mercy shall be shown to them.