

The crying of the Three - St. Catherine's, Stuttgart,

Trinity Sunday 2009

Through the Holy Spirit he has given us, God's love has flooded our hearts."
(Romans 5:5)

Today is a feast, a very special feast, a very English feast, because it was in England that this feast day was first celebrated in the Church. It is special not because some of you are being confirmed, though of course that is special enough, but because it is the Feast of the Holy Trinity, the festival not of some abstract doctrine, but a feast of the living God of love. We journey through the Christian Year – Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost – and the very first feast we keep after Pentecost, the explosion of God's life into the Church is the feast of it all so to speak. It is as though all the colours of the spectrum were fused back into a laser beam of light, dazzlingly bright, the rainbow gathered up into the white light of God.

When the poet Dante described his journey through hell and purgatory to paradise, he came in the end to see the vision of God, and what he saw was like a beautiful – a dazzlingly, wonderfully beautiful – rose pulsating with light, it was so beautiful and so wonderful that he could not look away from it, his eyes were glued to its beauty, held by the magnet of love. And today we are held by that same magnet of love, for to speak of God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is to speak of God as a circling dance of love, a dance in which we are called to share. Remember the Mock Turtle's song in Alice in Wonderland – Will you? Won't you? Will you? Won't you? Won't you join the dance? God calls us to join the dance of his own life, the dance of the love that made us, the love that reached out to us in Jesus, and the love which, as St Paul says has flooded our hearts. The old translation has 'was shed abroad in our hearts', and that was good because it reminded us that it is the same word used for shedding of Christ's blood – the pouring out of the blood of Jesus on the cross, the word Jesus used (and we shall use later on in the Eucharist) when we hear the words that Jesus used at the Last Supper – This is my blood, which was shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. It is a word which speaks of generosity, a giving, a sharing, a pouring out in abundance, a flooding of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Flooding is a good word too, for it reminds us of water, and it reminds us particularly today of the water of baptism, the life-giving water into which we are plunged at the beginning of our Christian lives, when we are baptised in the Name of the Trinity, in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Greek word βαπτίζω means to drench, or drown – and when the Greeks spoke of sinking a ship they spoke literally of baptising it. Some years ago I went to see the film Titanic. There is certainly a lot of water in that film and you could say it was a film about baptism and being saved – those who try to save themselves, those who are selfish and those who give their lives for others, in the flooding waters. The Greeks would have spoken not of the sinking of the Titanic, but of its baptism. So when we are baptised we are plunged into the life of God, into his love which will never let us down and will never let us go.

The Trinity tells us that God is love, a love beyond our imagining, a love so generous and so rich that we can never come to its end, and are totally transformed by it. How do we know someone loves us? They have to show us by who they are, by what they

do, and by what they tell us. A love without words can indeed be seen and known, but words and deeds tell us that we are loved – by mother and father, by husband and wife, girlfriend and boyfriend. If I stood here before you silent, you would not know me, or you would only know my barest appearance, When I speak you know me, and to speak I must breathe, for the words come out on my breath. God, the creator, the Lord of all, speaks to us in his Son. Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the one who shows and tells us what God is like, and his living breath is the Holy Spirit, for Spirit means simply breath or wind. So the Bible uses this as one way to speak of God, and because the God of whom he speaks is a God of Love that love is shown in a relationship, the relationship of Father and Son. Jesus is the Son who is, we might say, the spitting image of his Father – to have seen him is to have seen the Father, he is the stamp of God's very being, he is like a seal bearing the impress of what God is like. And that same likeness is given to us by the life-giving breath of the Spirit, the bond of love binding together the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit floods our hearts with God's life – not just our feelings but our wills, the very core of what we are, all that is represented by our names – Henning and Marva and Luke and Seth and Andrea and Morgan and Ann and Ian and Heather . And when the Holy Spirit floods our hearts with the love of God we are changed and transformed by the very breath of God's life. For what is this gift for? what is this life about? It is no less than making us Christ-like. We are to be changed St Paul tells us by the life of the Spirit into the likeness of Christ, from one degree of glory to another. When people see us and meet us they are to meet Christ. This doesn't happen overnight, it takes time to grow in love, to grow up into Christ, but that is what it is all about. It begins with our baptism when we are plunged into the life of God, and it ends in heaven.

Just before I confirm those being confirmed today I will stretch out my hands over the candidates and I will pray the most wonderful prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a prayer based on words from the prophet Isaiah. They are words about God's promised Messiah, and those words are used about you. You are to be those in whom the Spirit of wisdom is found, the Spirit who gives inward strength, the Spirit of delight in the fear of the Lord, the Spirit of delight in God's awesome presence, that divine dance of transforming love, which is the Holy Trinity, the life of God himself.

Dr. Pusey, the learned leader of the Oxford Movement in the last century, that movement which reminded our Church of the richness of its catholic inheritance, was heard to be whispering as he lay dying the words More love, more love, more love.... He was so overwhelmed by the love of God that he thirsted for it more and more as he passed from this life to the next. The saints of God are like that, and you and I are called to be saints, called to be those who live the life of God by the grace of God, for only the life of God is eternal life, and only the life of God, and his love and grace can change the world, and change it by beginning with our own lives. What a wonder and privilege it is to share in this life, this life flooding our hearts, and renewed in us week by week as we come to receive no less than Christ's own life in the communion of his love. May God bless those of you being confirmed today, and bless all of us caught into the dance of his life and love, that love adored by angels and archangels and all the company of heaven as they too sharing in that love sing the praise of the God of love: Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.

Rt. Rev.d G. Rowell