

Reflection for Trinity Sunday

For this Trinity Sunday our second reading is taken from the end of St Paul's lengthy correspondence with the Christian church he had founded in Corinth. It has been chosen because it ends with a Trinitarian blessing – a blessing which mentions all three persons of the Holy Trinity. He writes, *“the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”* This blessing has been largely ignored by the Catholic church throughout its long history but was embraced and popularised during the sixteenth century by the Protestant churches. It became known as “The Grace” and they incorporated it into their worship – perhaps because it was something they could claim as their own, something which the Catholics faithful to Rome did not use.

As a cradle catholic I grew up in an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility between Catholics and Protestants. We regarded Protestants as inferior beings who lacked the true faith. We didn't go into their churches and regarded it sinful to take part in their services. The second Vatican Council of the 1960's sought to break down this hostility and to work towards unity in the body of Christ so when I first went to services or meetings with Anglicans, Methodists, United Reformed, I was very surprised by how frequently they ended with everyone standing, looking around at each other, and pronouncing “The Grace” as a blessing upon each other.

This lovely verse of scripture has been rescued from relative obscurity by the Protestant churches. It was incorporated into the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer. As St Paul wrote these words it was a blessing from him to the people of Corinth. The book of Common Prayer amended this so that the whole community could use it as a blessing upon one another. So, when they rise and say “The Grace” they actually say, “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.”

Within this blessing something is ascribed to each of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. “Grace” is assigned to *“the Lord Jesus Christ”* and this is a reference to the grace conferred by the saving death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life brought about by his glorious resurrection. “Love” is assigned to God the Father which in our first reading is described as *“merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”* And the Holy Spirit is described as the giver of *“fellowship”* and community. As we heard last weekend, he is the giver of many rich and diverse gifts and the creator of unity in the body of the church.

As I have said in previous years, as Catholics we do everything in the name of the Holy Trinity, (in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit), rather than “in the name of the Lord Jesus” but we must thank our Protestant brothers and sisters for showing us the richness of this Trinitarian verse from St Paul which we had neglected for so long.