

TRINITY

Year A

In the dark of night a cautious diplomat from Jerusalem meets an outspoken prophet from Galilee. Nicodemus is genuinely impressed by the reports he has heard about Jesus, but as a member of the Great Council he is unwilling to risk showing open support. He has his future career to think about: so it is that darkness is his cover and secrecy his insurance. But Jesus' response to this caution on tiptoe is not more caution: he makes a very clear declaration about God's attitude to the world: ***“God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son.... For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.”*** And that includes Nicodemus.

Jesus meets the personal caution of Nicodemus with the affirmation of God's universal love. At the heart of the Gospel we hear that God's relationship with the world is rooted in love. It is not rooted in suspicion or condemnation as rumour has led so many to believe. It is God's radical love that gives our world its importance; it is that same love which gives all of us our essential dignity. God's love is all the more significant because it is fully aware of the sin and the brokenness and the stupidity that are part of our lives. It is not a love that protects itself from facing the negative side of life; it is a love that faces the complexity of the real.

That same truth is underlined in today's first reading when we hear God and Moses in conversation. Moses admits to the truth that the people are headstrong with a litany of sins and faults to their names. But this does not alter God's nature of being “a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness.” Whatever happens, God's love is never at issue.

At the center of the mystery of God is his everlasting love and fidelity. Given the shabby response of the world, the constancy of God's love is very difficult to grasp: a love that continues to be faithful even when it sees continued infidelity in those it loves. God's ceaseless love of the world is so great that he sent his beloved Son among us. The Son's faithful love is so great that he faced the ultimate infidelity – being put to death by those he loved. But God's love survives even the death of Jesus: God raised his Son and sent his Spirit so that we could share the very life of the love of God. God is love. In honouring the Trinity today ***we celebrate the awesome stubbornness of God's extravagant love for our world.***

It is of the nature of God that his love abides for ever. And if there is one thing we all ache to experience in our lives, it is the love we can depend on, the love that is not withdrawn when misfortune comes, the love that sees beyond our frailty and faults because it sets no limit to forgiveness. None of us has experienced the fullness of this authentic love, yet it is to that love that the whole of our being aspires. We can catch glimpses of it when we look at our own experience of love in the community. As St Paul says in today's reading: "Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you."

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all three persons reveal the fullness of the unity of God's love. We experience something of that love when it is communicated in simple ways through the people of grace we meet in our lives. Most of us have experienced it first in the generosity of our parents' love, one that is so important in the growth of every child of God. Of all the statements about parenting that I have read or heard, one of the simplest and the best – was a reflection by the Irish writer Clare Boylan in a radio interview where she spoke about the lasting power of her parents love:

My parents did two things for me: they gave me a sense of my own importance and they let me know that I was loved. I think that a lot of parents don't want to give children a sense of their own importance in case it becomes over-inflated; but we were always told that we were absolutely marvelous and that if anyone said otherwise they were wrong. That gives you tremendous confidence – and it lasts. If your parents have given you these two things – a sense of self and the love – you have them all your life. If not, you're forever looking for them... I don't think anything else matters.

Love is the essential atmosphere for every child to grow in, and when that love is sure any hardship can be faced. We are all children of the one God, and love is the essential atmosphere for our continued growth. But we are all responsible for playing our own part: none of us can retire from the task of helping to make our family and community a place where God's love gives shape to what happens. That is why Paul encourages the divided church in Corinth: "Be united; live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you."

None of the Trinity retires from the task of loving the world. God's love is sure and everlasting. As children of the one God we never grow out of the need of his love. Neither do we outgrow the responsibility to share it with others.

