

THE TRINITY AND MAN'S NEED¹

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THE first and last of man's needs is his need of *another person*. Man and woman, child and mother, the simple fact of friendship—we are made that way; we are made for other persons. We are made for a life that is meant to be shared. It is not good for man to be alone.

And the pain of loneliness is more than an ache in your hand: something that hurts, but it will pass, it is not all of you. Loneliness is a hurt in the centre of your self: you are *alone*, and you long for another to share your need.

Man is made for another: but in the end that other is *God*. All love asks to be shared (that is what love means: a sharing, a giving-and-taking). And a selfish love is no love at all. So it is that God (who is love) supremely asks to be shared. And that indeed is why the whole world was made, and above all why man was made. For man has a *mind*—he can find out for himself: he has a *will*—he can choose for himself: he has a *heart*—he can love the person he knows and has *chosen* to love. And all this he does freely: and the freest thing he ever does is to know God, to choose God and at last to love him.

That is why no loneliness is so terrible as that loneliness which is the lack of God, for there is nothing that so separates us from the life and the happiness that are meant to be ours. And that is what sin is: the loss of God, the chosen rejection not simply of God but of a man's true self. Man is made for another, and that other is God. And yet when he sins he chooses to say, 'I can do without you', 'I will not serve', 'I refuse to love'. The misery of separation from God is not just a matter of a law that is broken;

¹ This is the (modified) script of a service for Trinity Sunday, broadcast on the Home Service of the B.B.C. on 8 June, 1952. It should be explained that the intention was to attempt to answer the question: 'What can the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity mean to me?', a question imagined to be asked not by Catholics, not even by non-Catholic Christians, but by the millions who have never heard of the distinctions the theologians need to make. The script is therefore printed here as being no sort of a contribution to theology, but rather as an essay in presenting doctrine in terms of man's needs and their true fulfilment in the life of grace.

it is far deeper, for 'without me you can do nothing' says our Lord; yes, you can do NO THING that matters or will bring you happiness in the end. The pain of *this* loneliness is the pain of a life that has lost the colour and shape that give it meaning and joy. In seeking God we seek our own fulfilment as well: in rejecting God we reject ourselves as well.

And what is God's answer to man's need? That is the theme of what we want to say this evening. Man is separated from God: that is what his sin has done. God sends his Son into the world to bring that world back to God. God becomes man that man might return to him. That is what the Gospels are about. God, my Father, has sent me into the world, says our Lord, so that I may lead you back to him, to whom you belong, for whom you are made. And the Father and I are going to send a Holy Spirit who will go on teaching you the truth, who will go on filling your minds and hearts so that even now you may share in God's own life. In other words, God's answer to man's need is to reveal, to make known, his very self—the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit: three, who most mysteriously are yet one God, almighty, everlasting.

And this we could never have discovered for ourselves. This truth about God's own inmost life is beyond our human understanding, the day-by-day business of dealing with what our minds can manage on their own. But God has spoken, and God is true: if there be a God at all, he can never deceive or be deceived. And God has made this known to us through his Son, God made man for us. At the very beginning of our Lord's ministry on earth he declares it, when Father, Son and Holy Spirit are met in the mystery of his baptism in the river Jordan.

Then Jesus came from Galilee and stood before John at the Jordan, to be baptised by him. John would have restrained him; It is I, he said, that ought to be baptised by thee, and dost thou come to me instead? But Jesus answered, Let it be so for the present; it is well that we should thus fulfil all due observance. Then John gave way to him. So Jesus was baptised, and as he came straight up out of the water, suddenly heaven was opened, and he saw the spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting upon him. And with that, a voice came from heaven, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.—St Matthew 3, 13-17.

And at the very end of his work on earth our Lord confirms this truth, when he sends out his apostles in the name of the Trinity to continue his work as long as time shall last.

And now the eleven disciples took their journey into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had bidden them meet him. When they saw him there, they fell down to worship; though some were still doubtful. But Jesus came near and spoke to them; All authority in heaven and on earth, he said, has been given to me; you, therefore, must go out, making disciples of all nations, and baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all the commandments which I have given to you. And behold I am with you all through the days that are coming, until the consummation of the world.—St Matthew 18, 16-20.

And the first thing that we can do, the first thing we have to do, is to praise God. If all this is true, then we are RE-created now, made new, made able to share in the very life of God. Loneliness is over, for man returns to God.

Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give thanks to him for he has had mercy upon us.

Thou, eternal Trinity, art my creator and I am the work of thy hands, and I know through the new creation which thou hast given me in the blood of thy Son which was shed for me that thou art in love with thy workmanship. O eternal Trinity, thou art a deep sea, into which the deeper I enter the more I find, and the more I find the more I seek. Grant that I may see thee with the light that thou alone canst give.—

From the Dialogue of St Catherine of Siena.

*To thee honour and dominion,
To thee glory and power,
To thee praise and thanksgiving unto endless ages O God.
All thy creatures praise thee, adore thee, glorify thee,
O blessed Trinity.
From whom are all things,
By whom are all things,
In whom are all things,
To whom be glory for ever.
Praise be to thee, O blessed Trinity!*

*Let my soul bless thee, Lord God, my creator, let my soul bless thee,
Lord God.*

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

Almighty, everliving God, look mercifully upon our weakness, and stretch forth the right hand of thy majesty to protect us: through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God: and the Word was God . . . (et seq.)—St John 1, 1-14.

Lord God who didst appoint thy only-begotten Son to be the saviour of mankind, and didst command that he should be called Jesus, grant us this grace, that we may enjoy in heaven the vision of him whose holy name we venerate on earth: through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father: and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever: The spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, nor knoweth him. But you shall know him; because he shall abide with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans: I will come to you.—St John 14, 15-18.

God, who didst teach the faithful by sending the light of the Holy Spirit into their hearts, grant that by the gift of that Spirit right judgement may be ours and that we may ever find joy in his comfort: through Christ our Lord.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

In one sense that is all we can say of God: we praise him. And we praise him for what he is: he has told us, and his word is true. Of course the doctrine of the Trinity is infinitely mysterious: though not in the usual modern sense of something that *has* no solution. Rather it is an exact account of what God is like, and for that reason it is far beyond our limited human grasp. But that doesn't mean that the doctrine is just an affair for theologians. As far as we are concerned the doctrine of the Trinity is the great and central truth about God. For that reason alone we praise him for what he is: but in the light of it we see the central truth about ourselves: for we were created by God; we were re-created, made new, through his Son who became man for that very reason; and

the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son, is sent by them to teach us, to comfort us, to re-create us every day.

For Christianity doesn't mean just saying 'Yes' to a series of extraordinary ideas: it means saying 'Yes' to God, who made us for himself and wants us now to be happy with him for ever. And happiness means sharing a life: we know that in our daily business of living. And the final happiness means sharing the life of God. 'I am come' says our Lord 'that they have *life*, and have it more abundantly.' He tells us that he is the way, the truth and the life. And notice the order of things: he shows the *way* we are to follow. 'Follow me' he says quite simply to his disciples. He declares the *truth* we are to believe. 'Learn of me' he says. 'The words which thou gavest me I have given to them.' And all this that we may have life: the very life of God, made possible for us because the Son of God has taken our human nature and all its needs, has shared our manhood that we might share in the life of God that is his. For the Christian faith is not an idea, it is a fact; it is not good advice, it is good news; it is not a philosophy, but a life and all of a life—the life of God, the life of the Blessed Trinity, communicated to us, given to us to share.

That is why the truth about the Trinity matters so much. We began with man's loneliness, and we come to see that God's absolute lack of loneliness is the supreme truth about God—that eternal giving and taking within the single unity of God: *there* is the ultimate communication of one with another—nothing to separate, nothing to divide. To share in that mystery, to have part in that life, is the final purpose of the Christian life, man's fulfilment. Here is a truth that gives a new meaning to all our pain and misery and frustration. They would be intolerable if they were the whole of the story: if life meant only the separated life of our own selves. Even in the midst of the deepest agony and fear, the centre of ourselves can remain fixed and at rest, fixed on God, and at rest in his friendship. In the middle of a whirlpool you can see a point that is utterly still: there a leaf or a twig will stay suspended, while all around is the tumult of the turning waters. So it is with the man who is at rest in God, who shares in his life: he knows where his true home lies, and all else—the things that seem to matter most for the noise and distress they cause—all else matters not at all in the end.

For us, life means change and growth: we are creatures made

to grow; made to die, too, for that is the one certain event that awaits us all. But in God there can be no change, but yet he is life itself: life that is ever active, but ever at rest: the perfection of life. But how can we hope to have part in a life that is so far beyond our imagining? Our very restlessness, our very sense of our own futility, mean, to begin with, that rest and fulfilment can only be found in another. And that other—such is the Christian faith—is God who first made us, who has had pity on us even though we have rejected him, who has become a man for us and has in our very manhood broken down that wall of partition which has separated us from God. The way back to God, the way home for us all, has been opened for us by Christ our Lord. He showed us the depth of his love by dying for us—and that is the furthest point of love, to give your life for the one you love. And so it is that at the moment of his dying, life begins for us because grace begins, that free gift of God's obtained for us by Christ our Brother on the Cross, which even now makes it possible for us to hope for heaven. Indeed heaven begins for us, eternal life begins for us: we are born again, as our Lord says, no longer of the flesh but of the spirit. Baptised in the name of the Trinity and with the sign of the Cross, we share in all that our Lord achieved for us: we are made capable of sharing in the life of God.

We can even be called the 'Sons of God'. St Paul insists that 'those who follow the leading of God's spirit are all God's sons; the spirit you have received is not, as of old, a spirit of slavery, to govern you by fear; it is the spirit of adoption, which makes us cry out, Abba, Father. The spirit thus assures our spirit, that we are children of God; and if we are his children, then we are heirs too; heirs of God; sharing the inheritance of Christ.' And this adoption is not a mere legal claim; it is a free sharing now in the infinite life and love of God, for, says St John, 'as many as received him he gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name'.

For we are not simply meant to have ideas about God. Even the human reason on its own can have ideas about God: but God loves us, he wants us to love him in return. He wants us to possess him, to hold him for our own. He can go so far as to speak of us as his own dwelling, for, says our Lord, 'if a man has any love for me he will be true to my word; and then he will win my Father's love, and we will both come to him and make our con-

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tinual abode with him'. And so it is that the Blessed Trinity, most ultimate and tremendous of mysteries, is closer than breathing or touching: God dwells in the soul he has made for himself, in man whom he has re-created that he might come home to God.

Let us pray: *Almighty, ever-living God, who has permitted us thy servants, in our profession of the true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of that majesty to adore the Unity, grant, that by steadfastness in this same faith, we may be ever guarded against all adversity. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

All this presupposes Faith: believing in God, because he is the very Truth, trusting in God because his promises cannot fail. At the very beginning of our Christian life this is told us in the sacrament of Baptism, which, as it is administered in the Catholic Church, begins with two simple answers. 'What do you ask of the Church of God?' 'Faith.' 'And what does Faith offer you?' 'Everlasting life.' Here is the whole story: the beginning and the end of it all. 'Faith': the gift of God that enables us to know without the shadow of a doubt (there may be difficulties, but no doubts) that he is what he has said he is. 'Everlasting life': the final purpose of our whole human life: God's own life given us to share even here—and now.

That is why we need to pray for faith. 'Ask and you shall receive.' We need to pray for faith, even though in God's mercy we may already possess it: to pray that it may grow, that it may become, as our Lord said it should, a fountain of water springing up within us to life everlasting, the central source of all we are and all we hope to be. And if we have no faith, or think we have no faith, and yet long for it: that is something to be grateful for, that is a beginning. Our very misery, even despair itself, the sense we have of man's own insufficiency and the tragedy that comes upon him if he trusts simply in his own strength (and we have plenty of reminders of that particular tragedy in our own time): all that can lead us to see that the answer to our needs is not within ourselves: our loneliness looks for another. 'Lord I believe: help thou mine unbelief.' It is a prayer that all of us need to say, and we can, if we will, begin this moment—not tomorrow but now—to ask that the seed of faith may spring to life in us, so that we may hope at last for life everlasting, God's life for our sharing.

And here is a wonderful thing. It is the Catholic belief that

God has given us more than a vague hope that some day, somehow, our faith in him will have its reward. All that happened when our Lord brought us out of the slavery of sin and separation—all that happens still, through the Church whose whole purpose is to go on doing the work of Christ our Lord, teaching us, leading us, healing us, reconciling us to God, and through the sacraments uniting us to him even in this life. Our faith in the Church is a faith in God, in God's promises which are true. God has called us to share in his life: that is wonderful enough. But still more wonderful he has given us the very means to make that possible. It is as though he has shown us the end to which our journey leads, and has put us on the road to it, and finally has walked with us on the way, leading us, supporting us, for 'I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world'. All that he asks is that we should trust him, should believe that this is so. 'Lord I believe', but I am easily turned aside, there are so many other things that so easily attract me: 'Lord I believe', so 'help thou mine UNbelief'. Go on saying *that*. And day by day our life is surrounded by countless marks of God's mercy: the prayer, which may seem only half a prayer, a stammer that I force out when I suddenly realise how much I need the help of another, how much I need God, that prayer is God's gift. It is something to thank him for. And being a Christian means realising in the daily business of working and eating and just being that all the time we can be seeking God, if we want to: or we can turn from him, if we want to. It is what we *want* to do that matters, and nowadays so many of us just 'want' and we scarcely think of what we really want, or *whom* we want—God.

And so we sing in praise of God's gift of himself in the one sacrament we call blessed: that pledge of his love for us, the memorial of his dying for us when he offered his Body and Blood on the Cross for us, *the* mystery of Faith which assures us that indeed he is with us all days, here below through the certainty of Faith, and one day, please God, face to face in the final end to our loneliness in heaven. 'Bone Pastor': may he feed us, may he lead us, may the good shepherd at last bring his sheep into the fold.

[The *Te Deum*]

An Act of Faith: *My God I believe in thee and all thy holy Church teaches us because thou hast said it and thy word is true.*

Let us pray: *O Lord Jesus Christ who hast said, Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you: grant, we beseech thee, to us who ask the gift of thy divine love, that we may love thee with all our heart, word and deed, and may never cease to praise thee.*

Benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, descendat super vos et maneat semper. Amen.

