

For those of us who follow the New Calendar today is celebrated as the Sunday after the feast of the Theophany. Last week we celebrated the Baptism of Christ, which is called "Theophany" (the manifestation of God) because there, for the first time in the story told in the Bible, is God fully revealed as Trinity. The one who is being baptised in the Jordan by St John is proclaimed by the voice from Heaven to be "my Son", which implies that the voice is that of a Father. At the same time the Spirit of God descends like a dove upon the one who had just been identified as the Son, setting a seal of confirmation on the Father's declaration. And so, as we sing in the hymn of the feast, "the worship of the Trinity was made manifest."

We should notice here that as well as showing us the threeness of God this feast also reveals his unity. Although the Father, Son and Spirit are clearly distinguished one from the other, they are all involved in the one action – the Son undergoing baptism, the Spirit anointing him in his baptism, and the Father proclaiming the significance of the baptism. This puts paid to two heresies which troubled the early church and still can be found today. The first is the idea that God is a single entity revealed at different times under the forms of Father, Son and Spirit. This is sometimes called Sabellianism, and is clearly shown to be erroneous by the fact that all three appear simultaneously. The second heresy, still very prevalent, is one which would divide the three persons of the Trinity and in some way oppose them to each other. Thus we sometimes hear people say that the Father was angry with the fallen world, and the Son placed himself between the Father's anger and humankind so that he bore the brunt and spared us. This is shown to be erroneous here by the clear evidence of Father, Son and Spirit acting in unity, and by the Father's proclamation of the Son as the Beloved in whom he is well pleased.

The Bible is very clear: "You hate nothing that you have created..., O Lord, who love all that lives." (Wisdom 11:24-26). So, too, is our Liturgy: "This is how you loved your world: you gave your only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but have eternal life." "It is," says 2 Peter 3:9, "not God's will that any should be lost, but that all should come to repentance." We may be reminded of the words of the 14th century English mystic Julian of Norwich: "Before God made us, he loved us, and this love was never quenched, nor ever can be." In the Theophany we see the love of the Father sending the Son into the world, the love of the Son in his mission, and the love of the Spirit sealing and confirming these.

But we also remember in this feast that this love of God is offered, not just to the human race, but to the whole world, as the prayer in the Liturgy tells us, echoing John 3:16. Christ receives baptism, not because he needs (as we do) to be made clean, but in order to cleanse the world. The hymns of the feast repeatedly remind us that it is with the fire of the Godhead that he descends into the Jordan, and this fire is a purifying, refining fire. "Today," we sing at the Great Blessing of the Waters, "the nature of the waters is made holy." Water, the basic element for all life as we know it, becomes, by the blessing of God the Holy Trinity, a means of holiness for us all. We take the blessed water and use it to sanctify our homes, our possessions, our relationships, and our very bodies. Through its use we are renewed and given the grace, as today's Epistle says, "to come to the unity inherent in the faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13). Holy water cannot be diminished, for all water added to it is made holy by contact with it. Nor can it be diluted – whatever it sanctifies receives the same degree of holiness as the water itself, in which the grace of God is present. By using it we share in the will of God to sanctify all of creation. As we wait this year for the opportunity to bless the waters once more let us not lose sight of the truth set before us in this feast: the love of God the Holy Trinity has shone forth to us and to our world, calling all to live in his holiness. May God bless us all in the light of the feast. Amen.