

Trinity Sunday

I take as my text today, from St. John's Gospel:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

Today in the Anglican Tradition, we celebrate The Feast of the Trinity, a tradition that originated in the English Church about the 12th century. It continues as the major dividing line in the Church Year, separating it into two segments: the historic commemoration of the Life of our Lord and a season or period of instruction and discipline.

Trinity Sunday is the celebration of the ultimate revelation of what God is through all eternity: three persons in one God.

In truth, there is no easy explanation. At best, we accept a mystery that God is Three Persons in One: God the Father, Who is the creator of heaven and earth, of all things created; God the Son, who, in the Person of Jesus Christ, redeemed the world and all creation; and God the Holy Spirit, who is the Sanctifier of all life, of all creation.

Each Person of the Godhead, the Trinity, is co-equal, co-eternal.

Now, our Gospel passage, appointed from St. John, however, does not seem to focus on the Trinity but the concept of the Trinity is seen working in the Sacrament of Baptism, as we led into an understanding of the concept, *to be born again*.

The theme that runs through this Gospel passage is a rebirth, better yet, a *new birth*.

Here, St. John recounts the meeting of Jesus with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a very wealthy man, a member of the Aristocracy, and a member of the Sanhedrin.

This conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus may well be taken as St. John's apology for Christianity vis a vis the older faith of Judaism. The old versus the new, where the requirements of the old are, in a sense, made irrelevant by a whole new approach to the relationship of God to man.

The old was encumbering, based on a set of laws given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, and later expanded.

This Law —the Law of Moses — was the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, believed to be the perfect word of God and was considered complete and perfect.

Nicodemus, as a Pharisee, was sworn to observe every detail of the scribal law derived from the Law of Moses.

Nicodemus had come in the night to meet with Jesus and engage in discourse. Night-time was considered the most appropriate time to study the Law because it was then when a person would be most undisturbed.

Though he had much to discuss with Jesus, the focus of his discussion centered on how enter into the Kingdom of God.

The exchange followed a pattern that Jesus used with enquirers.

First, the enquirer says something, to which Jesus answers in a saying that is hard to understand. The saying is misinterpreted by the enquirer, and Jesus responds with an even more difficult saying, followed by a discourse and explanation.

So, it was with Nicodemus. He says to Jesus:

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Jesus gives an unexpected answer:

Except a man be born again, he can not enter into the Kingdom of God.

Our Lord truly understands what is really on the mind of Nicodemus and steers him away from dwelling on the signs and wonders that He did, telling Nicodemus that these were not so important. What was important was a change in a person's inner life.

But how can a man be born again? For Nicodemus, for the orthodox and pious Jews, the idea that they must undergo such a radical change before they could enter Christ's Kingdom, was a most difficult concept, if not impossible.

In this wonderful passage from St. John, we hear our Lord explaining that this *New Birth* is an inward and spiritual one, and he makes the point that it is not the evidence of signs and miracles that are important; it is the change of life, the spiritual rebirth through faith in Christ that is essential.

As we might expect, Jesus uses a word for *again* that has three meanings, all of which work together in understanding the concept of *born again*.

The word could mean *from the beginning, completely, radically*; or in the sense of *for the second time*; or it could mean *from above*, as in *from God*.

In signifying that this rebirth cannot come about *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit*, Christ is telling us that it is through the cleansing action of the Holy Spirit, that as water cleanses, purifies, and refreshes, so does the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, through John in his Gospel, conveys what is to come, that the visible sign of our spiritual rebirth will be the water of baptism, signifying the cleansing action of the **Holy Spirit**.

From the earliest days of the Church, that spiritual rebirth is consummated through the **Sacrament of Baptism**: the outward and visible sign being the pouring of water over the person baptized with the words, *I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost*.

To complete the Sacrament, we have the inward and spiritual grace, as it states in the Catechism: *A death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness...* we are made *children of grace*.

For Nicodemus, the outward rite was already familiar; it was a part of the Jewish tradition. But there was a difference.

The outward and visible sign was the same, that is, the water of baptism, the washing away of one's sins through sincere repentance and faith; however, with Christian Baptism, the outward rite was to be accompanied by an effusion of the Holy Spirit which makes baptism a real *new birth of water and the Spirit*.

Baptism under the New Covenant was not to be symbolic. Nor was it to be merely an initiation or a sign or a pledge of grace, or a simple ceremony of dedication, edifying but not really necessary. Rather, through Baptism we become Christians.

Pure and simple. Whatever the claim; no matter what good works a person may do; however good a life they may live: until that person is baptized with water in the *Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* and is cleansed of sin by the washing of the Holy Spirit, effused with the Holy Spirit, that person is not a Christian.

Baptism, as a Sacramental instrument, incorporates individuals into the *Mystical Body of Christ* and enables them to participate in the grace afforded therein. For each of us, for our souls, it is the true beginning of life. It is truly a *re-birth*, as we become through Baptism the adopted children of God and joint heirs with Christ of the Kingdom of Heaven.

So, we can now apply that same concept of the Holy Spirit operating through each of the Seven Sacraments of the Church. There are the outward signs, followed by the inward and spiritual grace which is the Holy Spirit completing each Sacrament.

Thus, on the Feast of the Trinity, we come to understand that each **Sacrament**, beginning with **Baptism**, is predicated upon God acting through his three revealed natures: the **Father**, who created us and loves us as his children; the **Son**, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us by his Blood; and the **Holy Spirit**, the Comforter, who dwells within us, who sanctifies us, and whose operation completes each **Sacrament**.

On the **Feast of the Trinity**, we not only celebrate the culmination of God's self-revelation of Himself to us, that is, the revelation to us of the ***Holy Trinity, God in Three Persons***; we also are reminded of the elemental nature of **Baptism**, and that it is through a spiritual rebirth and faith in Jesus Christ that we can enter into the ***Kingdom of Heaven***.

Many of us are like Nicodemus, searching for the truth and struggling with the answers.

Are we satisfied with ourselves, our lives? Do we want to be changed?

To experience the intellectual truth of Christianity is one thing; to experience its power is another.

Jesus Christ offers us the opportunity to experience the power of Christianity if we willingly submit everything to the **Will of God** through this ***rebirth*** that brings us into the **Bond of Love**, a bond signifying the Trinity.