

The Most Holy Trinity

First reading:

*The Definition of God's Name
(Exodus 34.4-6, 8-9)*

This is one of the really very central passages of the Bible. In Judaism, the special name of God (sometimes written 'Yahweh') is never spoken. For two reasons. It is too sacred and awesome to be pronounced, for the name somehow makes the personality present. It is also too intimate: we do not bandy around in public the special family name by which we are affectionately known by our nearest and dearest. So, where the name occurs in the Bible, a conventional 'the LORD' is used. The name itself was revealed to Moses at the Burning Bush, but not its meaning.

Here for the first time the meaning is given, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God of tenderness and compassion.' Only when God has to forgive Israel for its first, heinous but rapid, rebellion, is the meaning of the name revealed.

And this meaning is echoed again and again down the scriptures, in Deuteronomy, in Psalms, in Jeremiah. Even Jonah has to admit it when, to his fury, Nineveh is forgiven! This is the way Israel loves to picture its God, as a God of forgiveness. The Prologue of St John and the Parable of the Prodigal Son are no new inventions.

Question:

Is 'God of forgiveness' the most important concept of God?

Second reading:

*A Trinitarian Blessing
(2 Corinthians 13.11-13)*

This reading, concluding with the Trinitarian blessing, is the finale of this Letter to the Corinthians. The interrelationship of the three Persons of the Trinity is a theological elaboration, reached only gradually in Christian meditation. Paul, however, already often mentions the three Persons in parallel, making some distinction between them or at any rate between their functions in the story of salvation. When he mentions one he seems at the same time to be conscious of the influence also of the other Persons of the Trinity.

The constant triple mention of each of the Persons in itself suggests equality, each playing a special part, as 'It is God who gives you a sure place in Christ, giving us as pledge the Spirit in our hearts' (2 Corinthians 1.21), or 'You have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God' (1 Corinthians 6.11). Rather than prying, so to speak, into the personal interrelationships of the three, the scripture limits itself to mentioning the part played by each in our creation, salvation and sanctification. God, whom we also address as Abba, Father, is the initiator. It is through the work of Christ that we are justified, saved, redeemed, reconciled. The Spirit is at work in transforming us in holiness.

Question:

What would you like to add to St Patrick's cloverleaf image of the Trinity?

At first sight, this part of the dialogue with Nicodemus seems to mention only the Father and the Son.

A chief concern of the Gospel of John is to show the relationship of loving obedience between Father and Son. The love and equality in a perfect relationship between a human father and a son is the nearest reflection of such love that we can envisage. In complete trust and confidence, father gives to son everything that is his. His only interest is the advancement of the son. Son's only care is to please his father and to be as close to father as he can be, in word, action and relationships. Each has a vibrant and continuous bond of love for the other.

Such a relationship may be rare in human family life, but it can model for us a pale reflection of the loving relationship between the Father and the Son. And the Spirit is, in fact, mentioned because the love itself is the living bond uniting the two. We must, however, appreciate that any such language limps and belittles the divine relationship, which is of a different order of perfection and intensity. Human language can never begin to render the divine reality, which is utterly beyond our comprehension.

Question:

What is the best human image for the Trinity?
