

“Before the beginning of the earth.”

Prov 8:23

Whenever I try to explain the Trinity – for example, to a convert or to school children – I always ask at the end if they understand. Dutifully, they usually nod, admittedly a little hesitantly. Then I ask that when they really do understand it perhaps they could come back and explain it to me, because I certainly do not! In fact, no one understands it and no one ever shall. I don't suppose that even in heaven, when we shall see God as He really is (1 Jn 3:2), we shall understand the Trinity because although we shall be in the presence of the infinite we, ourselves, shall still be finite creatures, albeit in glorified form.

The truth is our human minds cannot encompass something that is infinite. The Most Holy and Undivided Trinity really is a mystery, and we shall never comprehend it. There are many mysteries in our Catholic Faith, doctrines that we are taught but never really and fully understand, such as the Incarnation: how can someone be fully divine and fully human at the same time? Such as transubstantiation: how can the bread and wine cease to be bread and wine and become the living Body and Blood, the Soul and Divinity of the Son of God instead? Such as the crucifixion: how can the evil of putting the Son of God to death become for us the greatest good in the history of the human race?

Certainly, there are some things that we *do* know about the Blessed Trinity, about the Father who begets the Son, the Son who is begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from both; and that they are all God, even though there is only one God, and that they are equal in glory and majesty, and that there was never a single fraction of a moment when one of them existed without the other two.

What we *do* know about the Trinity has been spoken of before, and will be spoken of again, but today I want to do something a little different. Instead of trying to explain the doctrine of the Most Blessed Trinity, I should like to encourage a sort of meditation.

Imagine, if you will, a cloud.

Imagine, like Moses, you see this cloud atop a mountain, and feel yourself being drawn up *towards* this cloud.

Now imagine yourself being drawn *into* this cloud so that you are surrounded by a mist, a fog. This mist, far from being intimidating, is in fact warmly welcoming and brings about a sense of intimacy with the divine. This mist is nothing less than the breath – the breathing forth – of the life of God Himself. To be encompassed in this mist is to be enveloped, to be circumfused, to be swathed in the presence of someone whose company is consoling and comforting, both liberating and protecting at the same time.

This mist, far from hindering your vision enables you to see what has always surrounded you but which, nonetheless, you have never seen before. It really is as it says in the Psalm: ‘In your light we shall see light’ (Ps 35:10).

Are these thoughts fanciful? Well, the image of a cloud to represent God’s presence is used again and again throughout Sacred Scripture. And here’s the funny thing: far from hiding God’s presence, clouds in the Bible are used to reveal – to *make known* – God’s presence. The first rainbow among the clouds forms an arc linking God’s presence in the heavens with man’s presence here on earth (Gen 9:13). The glory of the Lord dwells in the midst of a cloud on Mt Sinai when Moses is called to speak to God in the desert (Ex 24:16), and God comes down into the Tent of Meeting in the form of a cloud (Ex 40:32-36). God appears to prophets in the midst of clouds (Is 6:4; Ezek 1:4; Dan 7:13). The voice of the Father is heard from within the cloud at the moment of Our Lord’s Baptism in the River Jordan (Lk 3:22 et par), and again during the Transfiguration on Mount

Tabor (Lk 9:35). Our Lord is taken up into heaven at the moment of His Ascension in a cloud (Acts 1:9), and He will come again in clouds of glory at the end of time (Mt 26:64; Mk 14:62; Apoc 1:7).

This presence of God as a cloud, or in a cloud, is called by the Fathers of the Church the *perichoresis*: the indwelling or encompassing of God.

Today's feast of the Most Holy Trinity is not just about trying to understand the Trinity but about reaffirming our faith in a God who both dwells within our souls in the form of sanctifying grace and who, at the same time, surrounds and encompasses us in an all embracing bond of mercy and forgiveness, of tenderness and gentleness, of power and of majesty.

Today's feast is about our willingness to be drawn up and into this cloud of the unknown precisely so that we might become known to God, and that He might become more intimately known by us.

Getting to know the Trinity does indeed involve a knowledge of doctrine, but it also involves allowing ourselves to be drawn into God's company and wrapped in the mantle of His presence. And for this to happen, we need both to be present at His altar of sacrifice *and* to be enclosed in a garden of prayer all the days of our life.