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**Transformed into the Same Image: Trinity** (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

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Jesus reveals God – Jesus shows us who God is. That’s at the heart of Christian confession. The word ‘God’ can be filled with pretty much any content, as the mythologies of the ancient world showed. It’s because of Jesus and the way he fulfilled and transfigured the law and prophets of the Hebrew tradition that we understand God in the distinctive way we do. God on our side – for us; God seeking us out to free and heal us, assure us of forgiveness, give life beyond fear and death. This image of God – this faith in how things ultimately are – transforms how we live. It grounds our hope, our willingness to risk love and growth and vulnerability.

In the New Testament, the growing sense that Jesus reveals and communicates who God is culminates with the recognition that Jesus himself is in God and God in him. The doctrine of the Trinity might seem a long way from the dusty roads of Galilee and Judea. But it follows from what the disciples experienced in Jesus’ company. In him, they had glimpsed the freedom and power of the Creator. In their life with him, and especially after his resurrection, they knew that something of this same power had come to dwell in them. It was like a new energy, a new spirit and belonging. It drew them into the very relationship with God they had seen him live out. He had been with them and with God, filled with the Spirit of God. Now this same Spirit was in them, making them like him and joining them with his Father and with each other. Spirit, Jesus, God – communing indivisibly with one another and now with and in them.

This way of knowing God cannot be thought but only apprehended; the concept of the Trinity is forced upon us (if you like) as we’re drawn to share in the communicative life of God. But if human beings are made and called to be in the

image of God, all this makes a profound difference to what it means for us to be ourselves and to mature.

For one thing, it means that being-in-relation is the truth of us. I think many of us begin our spiritual journeys with an image of me 'here' and God 'over there', and all our effort is to get closer to there, to come into contact or relationship, to get to know God. We think of ourselves as separate but journeying towards. At some point, though, our sense of this begins to change – as we pray, as we let ourselves be in the presence, we discover that the Spirit of God is in here – that God's own energy is drawing me closer and I can no longer really experience myself at all except in terms of this relation, this deepening communion. St Paul spoke of the Spirit praying within, 'interceding' with sighs too deep for words (Rom. 8: 26), and in a similar vein Catherine of Genoa wrote in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, 'my "me" is God nor do I recognize any other "me" except my God himself'. The focus on 'getting somewhere' dissolves, and the sense of yielding to something already given, grows.

This yielding then transforms who we find ourselves being, in relation to others. Our awareness of those around us, our responsiveness begins to reflect the generosity and unthreatenedness of God. This is why Paul is concerned when these ways of relating are lacking in the early Christian communities, when there's dissension, rivalry and judgement. These are signs that some spirit other than the Spirit of God is at work. Of course, the process of being knitted into one – one with God, one with others, takes time. We resist and keep ourselves separate, defended, irritated, alone. We must practice patience and humility – with ourselves as well as others. But to let ourselves be transformed more fully in the image of God, to let ourselves grow and mature, just means being open to this process of being drawn in, indwelled, knowing the relation that God is from the inside. This how *we* become the kind of divine regard that makes it safe for *others* to be and grow; it's how we become, like Christ, communicators of divine grace and healing.

The Feast of the Trinity is an invitation to be present again to the magnitude of this promised transformation and the gift it is. We're each part of many different communities – workplaces, families, non-profits, support groups, churches – including this one! We interact with many more – with people at hospitals, schools, shops, telcos. The energy we bring to each one of our engagements affects the lives of others, the life of the world. We can be in such a way as to communicate life, generosity and kindness, or we can make someone else's day harder; we can build up, encourage and contribute or we can complain and criticize; we can enable authenticity and growth or fortify defenses and self-righteousness.

There's a certain amount of plain moral effort and self-control we need to exercise to be in reasonable relationship with those around us – as we deal with *their* foibles, inattention or hurtfulness, and with our own tiredness, anxiety and need to be right. But Paul is pointing to the possibility of a transformation in our being that's richer and more generative than self-control. He's saying that as the life of God's Spirit expands at the centre of our life, as we yield ourselves more and more to its energy, we find ourselves just being free-r, more joyful and loving: 'all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord ... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another'.

God as Trinity is often imaged in terms of a dance – a mutuality of giving and receiving which constitutes both the dance and the dancer. The life of discipleship, the life of prayer, is about letting ourselves be drawn into this dance, become one with it and so people who enable others to join in. Thomas Merton wrote that we can withhold ourselves from this dancing. We get complicated, we take ourselves too seriously – but, he says, this 'does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there'. In fact, 'we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very

blood ... [w]e are (he says) invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance'.<sup>1</sup>

It takes something to keep saying yes to this invitation, this work of grace. Sometimes we come up painfully against what's getting in the way, some pattern or habit of thought that's hard to let go, some fear of being deeply released or connected. At such times, maybe all we can do is notice our stuckness and wait on God, trusting that the one who has begun this work in us will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6. So may God grace us, heal and embrace us, lead us through darkness into light.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: A New Directions Book, 2007), p.297.