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When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. Romans 8:15b-17 (NRSV)

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Over the years there have been many television shows that have satirised and focused on family themes (and often called ‘situation comedies’, or shortened to ‘sitcoms’). Earlier shows have included My Three Sons; Family Ties; The Cosby Show; and The Brady Bunch. Most of these shows demonstrate people trying to work together for the good of their families. Often more humorous, and usually showing the male characters in a less flattering light are shows like, Bewitched; The Flintstones; Married with Children; Home Improvement; Roseanne; Malcolm in the Middle; Everybody Loves Raymond; and The Simpsons. But, in the main, these shows still try to reflect on how people ‘get along’ and somehow ‘work together’ for the ‘family good’.

More recently, however, shows such as ‘Home and Away’ and ‘Neighbours’ have taken a different approach. Instead of offering reflections on dealing with relationship issues, there seems to be more of an offering of some description of some ‘relationship issues’ (from a certain ‘worldly’ perspective) and little thought in regards to morals and ideas in dealing with these issues. Some may argue that these shows are more ‘real to life’ because they highlight that many (indeed, just about all families) experience problems at times. Others may contend that Christian people need to be careful in their exposure to such shows, especially if discussion about what family is really all about (in relation to what the Bible says) is absent.

The reality is that many families suffer disputes over the years. Indeed, as the years have rolled by, I would have to say all families suffer from disputes over time, and some, quite sadly, will struggle to be resolved this side of eternity.

In this regard, then, a question we may have is: what should be our ‘model’ for family life? Instead of looking to TV sitcoms (the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’, whatever they may be) where should we go for guidance in regard to how we shall live our lives, and how we shall live in our families?

As we think of relationships with one another, there are two significant Bible passages that speak to us.

The first is Genesis 1:26-27 where we hear: Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created human beings in His own image, in the image of God He created them; and female He created them."

The second passage is Ephesians 5:1-2 where we hear St. Paul say: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” What follows, then, are words about the way we live in relationships with people of the world; in relationships between husband and wife; in relationships between parent and child; and in relationship with those who surround our daily lives (including at work).

The key phrases here are that we are ‘created’ in ‘the image of God’, and we are to ‘be imitators of God’. In all our relationships we are to reflect something of the nature of ‘God’ to one another.

On this weekend (30<sup>th</sup> May, 2021) we celebrate ‘Trinity Sunday’. This is a unique church festival because, instead of celebrating some event (such as Jesus’ birth, or Pentecost, or the like) we reflect on a ‘doctrine’, that is, a ‘teaching’ of the church – that God is One, yet God is three.

Often we try to make sense out of this with analogies to things like apples (cut in half to reveal three parts: skin, fruit, core) and water (the three phases of ice, liquid, and steam). We generally struggle to make sense of the Trinity. One of the reasons these attempts fall short is not just because they provide pale analogies, but because they shift our focus from what the Trinity is all about: God is personal, God is real, and God exists in the perfect unity of love. (And to help us relate to this, we often draw a picture of a triangle, a ‘trinity’, if you will.)

However, when it comes to human relationships we often see something different – a ‘different’ sort of ‘triangle’. For example, there can be two children fighting over one toy. Each child has his/her eyes focused on the toy saying ‘I want it’. And this may lead to a fight when neither looks to the other, and thinks of the other, and what the other may want or need. And so there is a ‘broken triangle’. Of course, the television shows are full of ‘love triangles’. And, if we are honest with ourselves, we may also see how in our everyday people we are like one side of the triangle – focusing on our selves, and not looking at the needs of those around us.

St. Paul, in our Bible Reading today, speaks of this ‘selfishness’ within us in terms of ‘the flesh’. And the contrast to ‘the flesh’ is ‘the Spirit’ (that is, the Holy Spirit of God who leads us to God’s redeeming love through faith in Jesus – but more on that in a moment).

‘The flesh’ is ‘sin’, that is, anything that separates us from God. Of this, William Barclay says, “Sin is not simply an influence or a force; it is a kind of personal demonic power which invades a person and takes up residence in him. ‘The flesh’ is not simply the body; and the sins of the flesh are not simply fleshly sins. Idolatry, hatred, strife, wrath, heresy are all sins of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). ‘The flesh’ is human nature apart from God.’

In this regard, then, we may say 'the flesh' is basically what we have talked about in terms of love triangles gone wrong. But, in response to this, God the Father sent Jesus His Son into the world to show us another love triangle. Jesus perfectly did God's will. Jesus perfectly came to love what God loves -- namely, the world, us (John 3:16).

The end of our 'love triangles' gone bad is death; we are perishing. But the end of Jesus' love triangle with God the Father is life, eternal life. And the Holy Spirit is the One who brings us out of our love triangles gone bad and into God's love triangle. The Holy Spirit is God at work in our lives to bring us the love of Jesus.

No matter how hard, so often our 'love triangles' end up going bad on us. So often two people – instead of looking at one another whilst looking at some other 'thing' (be it a toy or another person) they instead – look to the 'other thing' with 'blinkers on' towards those around them.

In the end, we may say, all our relationships have a 'bad end' because we know they will 'end' one way or another because of death. That is why the Christian faith came to see the necessity of the doctrines of both original sin and the Trinity. Original sin describes the mess we are in, hopeless for us to get out of on our own. The Trinity describes the shape of God's salvation: the only hope for us was for the Father to send the Son in order to establish a love triangle that doesn't go bad.

When it comes to this most holy day in our church year – when we are called to reflect upon the mystery of God's 'being' – so often we let ourselves stumble and fall on the mystery and the truth and the majesty of the 'being' of God. But if we want to understand something of the mystery of the 'being' of God maybe we ought to consider His 'being' in terms of His 'relationship' with us all.

When we look at our world (and sometimes, even our own lives), we see how we so often make a mess of things. Although there are wonderful high points in our lives (and in human history) the painful truth is that so often we experience suffering.

However – as Christian people – we know that that God took on human flesh and came to us in the person of Jesus. God is not only our Maker, but God is our Saviour. As the Nicene Creed says of Jesus, He is "of one being with the Father," and, "for us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human." Furthermore, we know that God is present in our lives because He has given us His Spirit.

God is a personal being. Because of this, there are three important consequences for our daily lives.

First, because God lives in the perfect unity of love, **we know that true love is possible**. Also, because 'God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son' we also know that holy and forgiving love is possible.

Second, because God relates to us in a personal way both in the person and work of Jesus (who is our Saviour), and also the person and work of the Holy Spirit (who leads you to faith in Jesus), **we know that we may have a personal relationship with God.** Thus, as St. Paul says, 'You have received a spirit of adoption. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.'

Finally, because God is personal and we may have a personal relationship with Him, **it is also possible, then, to have relationships of love with all people around us.** This won't necessarily mean hard work and suffering. Indeed, God's relationship with us required suffering and death, and that may also be the case for us. But love is possible.

On this side of eternity we shall never fully comprehend the mystery of the Trinity. But maybe we are not meant to. Just because a husband or wife may have trouble articulating their love for their partner, this does not necessarily mean that there is no love there at all. Likewise, even though we may have times in describing who God is to those around us, this does not mean God is not present in our lives.

In all our doubts, trials, and troubles in love, let us joyfully remember: The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Amen.