

Sunday June 21st 2020 9.30am

Fathers' Day (Trinity 2)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

Triangles are, to me, a very satisfying shape. Their three-sided quality appeals to me aesthetically and I love the way in their regular form they can be tessellated to create other shapes. A triangle is a strong shape and, as such, is often used architecturally and in construction projects and the rule of the golden triangle is a principle used in art and photography to guide the best composition of a picture.

However, there's that old saying, "two's company, three's a crowd", which reminds us that in terms of relationships, a triangle is not at all the best of shapes, often creating disunity and ugliness instead of strength and beauty. Relational triangles, often referred to as "love triangles", provide the lurid headlines in the tabloid press, the circumstances in which the crime is committed in gripping detective stories and the drama in so many film and television sagas.

In the classic love triangle, there are three people, one of whom is stuck between two different love interests. There is much competition between these two, each vying for the time, attention, energy and love of the third, while for all of them the basic question is one of priority, commitment and loyalty. Love triangles are part of the human condition....and today's gospel reading from St Matthew challenges us to question whether we are in a love triangle.

This is a difficult, uncomfortable reading to hear, especially today when we particularly think of and pray for fathers everywhere. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Jesus' words point out that we are in at least two love triangles, the first involving Jesus, us and our parents, the second involving Jesus, us and our children. Of course, there's a third which involves our partners, our husbands and wives, and probably more which may involve our work, or our financial commitments, our leisure time and our friends. Each of these triangles confront us with two questions. What is our most important relationship? Whom, or what, do we love most?

The correct answer is there in the text. We should be answering “Jesus” without any hesitation, affirming with confidence that he is the one we love most. Maybe many are able to do that. But for many others, despite knowing that the relationship with Christ should be the most important, the “lived” reality is much more complex. What about vows exchanged with a much-loved partner? Where do our diaries suggest we spend most time? Where do our bank statements tell us we spend most money? Love triangles are places of struggle and conflict and not easy to live with.

The message of today’s gospel demands we make a choice. It asks of each of us an answer to those two questions... what is our most important relationship and whom do we love most? Jesus asks us to love him, not only above our own flesh and blood, parents, children, husbands and wives, but above everything else in our lives. He says there can only be one primary relationship in our lives, and it should be with him. This is an unequivocal message, leaving no room for doubt and it is extremely challenging. Does it mean that we should reject our parents, our children and our spouses and partners? Does it mean that we should turn away from anything else we love?

In extreme cases, that may be the case. The first disciples certainly left behind former lives and loves as they followed Jesus, and Christian history tells of countless believers who sacrificed family and personal preferences to lead a life of faith. However, Jesus is asking for priority, not exclusivity. He doesn't ask that we love him and nothing else; he asks that we put him at the centre of our loving, that he becomes our primary, most important relationship.

This demand is for our own good as the relationship we have with Jesus, God embodied in human life, flesh and blood, not only gives our lives meaning and direction, but it benefits our other love interests. A strong relationship with God becomes the lens through which we see the world, each other and ourselves. It's the foundation on which we build our lives, guiding the choices we make, the words we say and the ways in which we act and relate. A loving relationship with God put at the centre of our lives, determines how we love others.

Reconciling the correct answer to the questions Jesus asks of us with the "lived" reality of our lives may not then be as impossible as it first seemed. As we wonder how to say to our

parents, our children and our partners, “I love Jesus more”, we remember that individually, we are surrounded by God’s love for us. He is our father, wanting for us nothing but the best and it is his face that we see in all those others that we love. We do not betray them by making God our priority because he shows us what a loving relationship is, and he enables us, in our relationship with him, to love as he loves us. A love triangle which puts God at the peak is strong and beautiful enough to encompass all those we care for. It allows all our smaller love triangles to tessellate within it... because after all, we love each other best when we love God most.

Amen.