

Homily For Trinity Sunday 2010

"I was by his side, a master craftsman, delighting him day after day, ever at play in his presence, at play everywhere in his world, delighting to be with the sons of men."
Proverbs 8.30-31

The playfulness of the wisdom of God brings delight to the heart of the Father. This is a wonderful visual image, a great antidote to the rather stern and sombre images that sometimes seem to dominate our religious vocabulary. It does seem that, amongst all the other characteristics of God, there is plenty of room for playfulness, plenty of room for delight. This is a pretty good starting place for thinking about the Trinity. Let's have a year off from getting bogged down with how there can be three persons who are at the same time just one God. Let's not try to explain, let's just enjoy. If I told you that it was time for some stories of our holiday experiences, you would probably groan a little (inwardly, politely, of course). My holiday stories are fun for me because I was there, I experienced the events, I ate the food, I saw the views, I visited the places. No amount of explaining can conjure up for you the image that I carry in my mind. I cannot explain them fully to you; in the end, all I can do is say 'you'll have to go and see for yourselves'. There are some things, in fact probably almost anything of real value, that simply cannot be explained, cannot be put into words, it just has to be experienced. When I hear some beautiful music, or see a beautiful picture, my first reaction is 'wow, this is good'; it is only later on that I might, or might not, say 'I wonder how they did that'. So our first reaction to the Trinity shouldn't be 'how does that work then', it should be 'wow, this is great, this is wonderful, this is delightful'.

It is clear from the first reading that delight is something of the essence of God. As we are made in God's image, the ability to feel delight must be a part of our nature, too, but there is an element of skill to this. The ability to feel delight is something that we can develop in ourselves, or we can suppress it. Delight requires us to be able to stop for a while, to quit being busy and just watch, or listen, or touch, or taste. You cannot be delighted while you are in a hurry, or on the move, you cannot be delighted if your mind is not focussed on the present but is busy regretting the past or trying to control the future. Busy-ness is an enemy of delight, as are cynicism, negativity and selfishness. Delight is not something to be confused with pleasure: pleasure says 'I like this because it makes me feel good'; delight says 'I like this, just because it is wonderful'. The two are not the same. If we can find a way into delight, we will have found a way into the Trinity. Maybe this is something worth thinking about as we come to the beginning of summer, a time when all of us might hope to have some leisure, some time to ourselves, time away from work-day routines. What is that time for, how can that holiday time make my life better? Of course, to some extent it is a time to rest, so that we can go back to work with renewed energy, but that is not the whole of the story. If we look back at the creation story in Genesis we will certainly see that God rests on the seventh day; but at the end of each of the previous days he looks at his creation, and sees that it is good. He delights in his creation. Delight comes before rest.

So what does this mean in practice? It means that we need to rediscover what leisure time is for¹. Our holiday time, the weekends, our days off, our snatched moments or hours, are something we need to make better use of. They are times for rest, of course, but above all they are times for delight. When daily life seems mundane, or dull, or tiring, or grey, it is inhuman. To some extent we have to put up with that, but one of the ways we put up with that is by making some sort of protected space where we come into contact with things beyond the everyday and the ordinary. To get through the dull days we have to put ourselves in contact with 'wow' moments, with something that is truly wonderful, something that makes our hearts sing.

Unfortunately we tend to do exactly the opposite. When we are tired and most in need of delight, of something that makes us see that life is wonderful, the world is incredible, we tend to settle for a drink and the television, things which anaesthetise us rather than stimulate us.

Today's image of the Father being delighted by the playfulness of wisdom invites us to reconnect with wonder and delight, it invites us to use our time, above all our leisure time, wisely. Of course let's have a rest, but if all we do is rest, we will just climb reluctantly back onto the treadmill unchanged, and while our bodies are rested our hearts, our souls, remain as dry, as thirsty for wonder as ever. So in this summer let's try and capture something of the delight of the Trinity. Let's try and learn to listen with wonder, to look with amazement. Let's read books that help us relax, yes that's fine, but let's also read books that challenge us, that stimulate us, that make us see the world through different eyes. Real leisure, wisely used, is not about making us more efficient, but about making us more human (cf Pieper pp.34-5).

I don't know if you read about a report published this week by The Mental Health Foundation called 'The Lonely Society?' which looks at the rise of loneliness in our society², where 11% of people say they feel lonely often, and 29% of people say they don't have enough time to spend with friends and family. The authors suggest that one factor that lies behind the problem of loneliness is our obsession with being busy and productive, and our belief that time given to 'useless' social and relationship activities is less valuable than time given to being productive. This sounds familiar; there is no delight here. The real ability to use our leisure time well is one of the antidotes to loneliness. Working hard with other people does not stop us being lonely, because it leaves our deeper selves untouched. Leisure time spent with others, shared 'wow' time, shared delight, those can send loneliness flying. As Catholics we ought, by rights, to be better at this than anyone else. Shared 'wow' time is, of course, exactly what we are doing now. That is what the mass is, that is what worship is. We come together into the presence of God, and if we really take to heart what is going on we are all driven to our knees in wonder and delight. Here the Holy Spirit, the wisdom of God, is at play. Here the incredible becomes possible. Here we touch the very deepest mystery of human existence. Here we catch a glimpse of the delight in the heart of the Father.

¹ See Pieper, Josef 'Leisure, The Basis of Culture' St. Augustine's Press, South Bend, Indiana 1998.

² Griffin, Jo 'The Lonely Society?' The Mental Health Foundation, London 2010.