

During our journey through Holy Week we are going to look at “In the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit” for the first three days. As a phrase we can say it sometimes so often, that it can trip of the tongue without us really thinking what it means. The formula is so familiar to us all, “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” – it opens and closes most acts of Eucharistic worship, it began, this sermon. It is one of two elements required for a valid Christian baptism – the other being that water flows over the skin of the candidate.

The Trinity is important to us also because we have these same experiences of God: as creating love (Father), redeeming grace (Son), and sustaining and transforming presence (Holy Spirit). We experience God in these three different ways, but we hold to the faith that we are not worshipping three different Gods, but one God. So the Church came to express it this way: One God in Three Persons.

So this evening, I am going to concentrate on the element of the Father.

To say that God is **Father** is another way of saying that our experience of the world and of life is not like that of peeling an onion – after taking away all the layers, all we’re left with are tears. Our experience is not that of going to the very heart of creation and finding blind fate or a dead machine. To say that God is Father is to say that the universe was created and continues to be sustained by a loving, personal power who is involved in the life of his creation.

A Father who not only gives life to the world, but who called us out of nothingness and brought us into being. Just as a parent knows his or her child and calls them by name, so God who created us and gave us life knows everything about us and calls us by name.

Jesus called God “Father”. He always spoke personally to him, “my father” as if to stress the particular relationship which he had with the first person of the Trinity and to distinguish it from the relationship others can have through faith in him, Jesus was God’s son. By faith and grace we, too can become “sons of God” if you like – but never in the sense in which Jesus was. Clearly his relationship with the Father was unique.

But while we can never become “only begotten sons of God”, we can enter into the intimacy of the relationship which Jesus had with the Father, we too can call him Abba. St Paul puts it like this “You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him, we cry “Abba, Father”.

“Abba” was the most intimate name for father – Slaves were forbidden to address the head of family as “Abba”. It was the word a young child would use as it climbed onto the father’s lap – it expresses the idea of warm intimacy, and absolute trust – a relationship of dependence, true, but not of servility. We are God’s beloved children, not his slaves.

This same Father God is the source of unconditional love and forgiveness. The greatest gift we can give our children as parents, I believe, is unconditional, absolute love and acceptance, along with a set of guidelines to live by.

We must let our children know that we love them unconditionally, and even when they push on those guidelines, we still forgive them and still love them.

This is exactly what our heavenly Father does with us. God has given us absolute love and rules to live by, and while we don't always follow those rules perfectly, that doesn't lessen God's love for us. Our God is as ready and willing to welcome us home when we stray as the prodigal son's father was.

During our journey through Lent, as we unpacked the Lord's Prayer – it is our Father's will we must do, it is his Kingdom that will come, it is the Father who provides us with our Daily bread and forgives us. It is the same Father who leads us away from temptation and delivers us from harm.

It is very poignant, as we travel towards Good Friday that in the garden of gethsemane, as Jesus, alone wrestled with his human reluctance to face what lay ahead. And as he did, that he should begin his prayer – Abba. The one whose will it was that this sacrifice should be made was not a remote God – demanding the fulfilment of some preordained plan. It was his own loving, caring, understanding father. And perhaps for us – that is a lesson for each one of us, when pain and testing faces us and we shrink back from it. Let us not forget that the one whose will we seek to do is no tyrant, but “Abba, father” – we are the beloved children of his family.

Amen