

S.D.G.

Soli Deo Gloria

Glory to God Alone

This is what Bach wrote at the end of his church compositions.

By doing this Bach was confessing that there is only one God,

To whom belongs all glory, majesty, power, and might.

And yet he confessed, as we do today.

That although that there is, alone, one God

This God is a community of love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Through our baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son

And of the Holy Spirit.

We are drawn into this community of love.

Where we experience the beauty of God,

And where we are freed to share in this love

In our life together as God' people in his creation.

Today's Gospel reading includes

What is probably the most famous verse of the Bible:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. John 3:16

Verses like this one reveal to us that when we are dealing with God

We are dealing with a community:

God, as the text says, so *loved* the world, that he sent *his Son*.

In the life of the church there is a traditional and simple way

Of describing what God is like.

This is not an *explanation* of God,

But a *description* of the mystery of the reality of God as a community of love.

Here's how the description goes:

The Father is God

The Son is God

The Holy Spirit is God.

The Father is not the Son

The Son is not the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not the Father.

There is only one God.

You can take this simply stated description of what God is like
And spend a lifetime meditating on it.

But today I want to draw your attention to two aspects of the teaching.
The first is that there is an *equality* in the community of the Trinity.
So, for example, the Son is not less God than the Father is.

It's not as if there church is confessing that Jesus is *almost* God,
But that if we want the real thing we need to turn to the Father.
No, if we have seen the Son, we have seen the Father.

Secondly there is not *interchangeability* in the Trinity.
So, it's not as if the Father is simply the Son in another form
Like water can be ice or steam.
No, there is *real difference* in the persons of the Trinity,
In this community of love.

We need to hear this teaching and think about it
Because we as human beings naturally conclude
That if there is difference between persons
Then there must be unpleasant power relationships,
Then there must be domination of one over the other.
But as we get to know Jesus
And as he reconciles us to the Father
And as he gives us the Holy Spirit -
The one who comforts us, helps us in our need, and speaks up for us -
We are welcomed into a new way of life
Where we see that difference can be brought into a harmony,
Into a beautiful unity where love shines in darkness.

So, for example, in John 13 we read that Jesus, on his last night with his disciples
At his last shared meal with them, took of his outer garment
And as a servant, stooped down and washed their feet.
The text says: **After [Jesus] had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.**
First of all there is difference: even, you could say, hierarchy.
Jesus says that his disciples are right to call him 'Teacher' and 'Lord'
That is really what he is, and what they are not.
And yet he goes on:

So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. John 13:12-17

As Christians we see true difference in the genuine authority

Exercised by our Lord Jesus in his service to us:

In his ministry of serving his disciples,

And especially in his sacrificial death, that draws us to the Father

And into life with God.

As we hear in today's reading:

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

So that *whoever* believes in him, that is:

No matter what the differences in the human community

Where opportunities for domination are so evident,

No matter what the ethnicity, the gender, the socio-economic status,

Whoever believes in the Son of the Father may have eternal life.

This life with God has real practical implications in our life together

Because as we are drawn into the community of love, into God,

We are freed, in all our differences, to live the life of love here and now.

So in 1 John we read these words: **Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

God is love:

So we could flesh this out, echoing St Paul, and say

That *God* is patient, *God* is kind.

God is not envious or boastful or arrogant.

God is not irritable or resentful,

He does not rejoice in wrongdoing,

But rejoices in the truth.

But St John wants to give the *chief* example of God's love at work

So in harmony with today's Gospel reading he writes in his letter:

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

We are so fearful of God,

And like our first parents we naturally do not trust God
Or expect to receive good things from him,
But we naturally rather try to cover our shame, and to hide from God.

But God, who is love, and who has created us,
Provides for us in our need
Even in our need for atonement for our sins,
Even when this means sending his Son as the Sacrifice of atonement,
As the lamb of God, who takes away the Sins of the world.
So St John writes: **Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.** 1 John 4:7-12

J.S. Bach had not seen God
And yet his music, written to the glory of God alone
Was suffused with *freude*, with the joy, with the delight of the gospel.
We have not seen God, but as we,
Who share in the life of the community of love,
As we love one another,
Not seeing the differences among us as chances for domination,
But as opportunities to participate in the transcendent harmony
That sounds out in acts or simple service,

As we love one another,
God lives in us,
And his love is perfected, his love reaches its goal,
In our life together.

So let us live in this love.
To the glory of God alone. Amen!