

Sermon for the Feast of the Holy Trinity

'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?'

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There are things of which we have heard, and things of which we have seen, that we do not understand, and yet hearing and seeing, we know.

There is a song, written in 1908, sung to the tune of Holst's Jupiter, the tune we hear often sung to hymn 941, a hymn we sing today. Yet this song is a patriotic song, well known among the British, if I am well informed, called 'I Vow to Thee My Country.'

The verse goes as follows:

*'I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.'*

It is a patriotic song, and a lovely one. It is in fact a song of war. A song to encourage young men to sever themselves from life for the sake of the nation, for such is a good death.

The author of the song wrote a second verse, one much more explicit in its military aims. It speaks of the call to arms, of the nations putting on its helms and weapons, and of the enemy's dead lying about the feet of the proud, patriotic son.

After the First World War, the poet who wrote this song replaced the second verse, no longer having a love of the bloodlust of war, having seen its horror.

He kept the first verse, the promise to devote oneself to his country without condition. But in place of the second which rejoices in *wars and rumors of war*, he wrote instead:

*'And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.'*

On this day that we call the Feast of the Holy Trinity, we speak of this King that we may not see.

For last week, we heard of men, afraid, having seen the death of their teacher – and following, the rising of the same – whom, confused, were given the gift of the Holy Spirit, that they might brace themselves against all the falsehood of the world, and preach the Gospel of repentance and the Kingdom of Heaven.

This gift of the Spirit was given them of the Son, a Son made incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary; who suffered with them for three years, wandering Galilee of the Gentiles, and Judea of the Jews, being questioned by the scribes, accused by the Pharisees, and mocked by the masses, judged by the Romans, and murdered by all, upon a cross of wood: a cross that would be called His throne, for He was indeed a king, the king of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This King came down from heaven in obedience to His Father, who is in heaven, that He might establish His rule over all the nations of the earth. A rule not of violence or power or submission, but a rule of forgiveness, for the Father loves His Son, even as the Son loves His people, for *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that so whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life.*

This Feast of the Holy Trinity, it seems we confess a doctrine that no one can understand, that there is one God that is also three persons, though the three persons are not separate, nor are they merely three forms of the one God. *Yet there are not three gods, but one God, even as there are not three lords, but one Lord.*

We struggle to make sense of it, but all such struggle is futile, for we are seeking to envision what cannot be known.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Today, we speak of another country that we all have heard of long ago, of which we are all citizens, of which we are all soldiers.

A country whose King we cannot see, *for no man has ever seen God.*

Yet her armies we may not count, not because they are so few, so invisible, but because they are so many, *a great cloud of witnesses*, martyrs and saints and mothers and children and men and fathers of countless generations; from when Adam opened his eyes to Eve, to your own mother, who at last closed her eyes to a cross upon the wall of a hospital wall. *So great a cloud of witnesses*, an army we may not count.

This great kingdom, this great country, the Church, has seen many things: it has seen its King stay the hand of Abraham as he raised a knife to the throat of Isaac. It has seen David be forgiven the sin of murdering his lover's husband. It has seen the Christ raised up upon a cross. It has seen the Lord ascend into heaven.

Now in these latter days, when the King cannot be seen, the Church vows to Him all earthly things above, that we may *fear and love him above all things*. The love that asks no questions, for some questions cannot be answered.

The love that stands the test, for we shall be tested. The love that never falters, for shall be battered. The love that pays the price, for precious is the pearl.

The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice, for it is written: *'I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.'*

'Do you not understand these things?'

All these things we confess, even the King that seems forever invisible in this dark age of sin and corruption. For we live in hope, knowing that the Holy Trinity reigns now and forever in His Kingdom, whose fortress is the faithful heart, and whose pride is suffering, who silently conquers every soul, whose paths are ever peace. Peace in the Kingdom of Heaven, though we may die due to the kingdoms

of man. Even then, such is a good death.

For though we may not see, yet the true King we know: the Christ, the Crucified,

'Who so loved the world.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 6:1-8; Acts 2:14a, 22-36; John 3:1-17.