

I know all the theological things I'm supposed to say about the Trinity; I know it's assumed that I'll talk about the nature of the union between Father, Son and Holy Spirit; or outline the historical development of the dogma of the Trinity; but that's been done a several million times over in homilies and books since the fourth century. Not by me, it's true, but by theologians, scholars and Doctors of the Church infinitely better qualified than me to say something – anything – about the Trinity.

So I won't do that. I'll talk instead about what I think and feel. Beginning with two quotations.

The first is: "God's first language is silence. Everything else is a poor translation."

The second is: "Why talk of God? Everything you say will be a lie."

The first quotation is from Jalāl Rumi, the medieval Sufi poet and mystic. He lived most of his life in Persia.

The second is from Meister Eckhart, the medieval Dominican theologian and mystic, who lived most of his life in northern Germany.

Eckhart was 13 years old when Rumi died; they never knew of each other; they lived far apart; they were from different faiths; yet they both said exactly the same thing; many others said it before and after, but it was summed up by St Augustine in the 5th century: *Si comprehendis, non est Deus* – ‘If you understand it, it’s not God.’

All of them are saying that God can never be known or understood in himself. Off-putting, really; it makes you wonder whether it’s actually worthwhile bothering.

I used to look up at the high, distant mountain peak of profound, deep, silent, imageless prayer and think: I’ll never be able to climb that, ever. And then one day I realised that way down at the base of the mountain, all my childish chattering and anxieties and distractions in prayer, in God’s eyes, *are* that unreachable mountain peak. For him they one and the same thing. I find this consoling because I have never known or experienced that mountain peak. Except in God’s eyes... and of course, his sight is keener than mine.

So if God can never be known or understood in himself, what’s the point of the Trinity? Gregory of Nazianzus, one of

the greatest of the early Church Fathers, said that even Father, Son and Holy Spirit are metaphors.

We might not be able to know or understand God as he is in himself, but we *can* encounter him in love through any number of *portals* – doorways, openings onto a Presence which we would otherwise never know.

For Christians, the Trinity is the greatest and most radical of all portals through which we may encounter God. It is a metaphor, an image that was revealed to us and, so, the Trinity is the *source* of all other portals. All doorways have their existence in the Trinity.

Icons, for example: the Orthodox faithful will always have a candle burning before an icon, because they believe it is exactly such a portal, a doorway onto the divine Presence. So icons, as portals, are trinitarian.

Music, too: among so many possible examples I would choose the second psalm from Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms – Adonai ro-i lo echar* – 'The Lord is my Shepherd'. For me that is a portal, a doorway onto a higher, more authentic dimension than the petty, angst-ridden circumstances of my daily life. Or *Soave sia il Vento* – the trio

from Mozart's 'Così Fan Tutte'. Whatever music does the same thing for you – puts your life into some kind of spiritual perspective and brings God that little bit nearer – be it classical or pop or plainchant – it is also trinitarian.

Or art. Andre Gide said: 'Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does the better.'

Or gardening. The 18th century poet Christopher Smart said: 'Flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.'

Or the greatest portals of all, our behaviour towards other people: loving kindness towards others, giving our time to the tedious and the boring, forgiving a wrong done to us, getting someone's shopping in these surreal times; all these are trinitarian. They also remind me to say that the present pandemic – despite the random cruelty of it – has shown us so many portals that we hadn't realised were there.

As the source and origin of all doorways onto the divine, the Trinity is rooted in everything we think or say or do; because everything we think or say or do *is* a portal, a doorway. The only thing is whether we open it or not.