

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity Philadelphia on Sunday May
18th 2008 by the Reverend Alan Neale
“A Healthy and Productive Committee???”**

Today is Trinity Sunday... the day when this church celebrates its Patronal Festival or its Feast of Dedication. Trinity Sunday! In October 1939, speaking of Russia, Prime Minister Winston Churchill said, “I cannot forecast to you the actions of Russia... it is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma”. A riddle... in a mystery... inside an enigma and perhaps many of us approach the doctrine of the Trinity with similar feelings in mind... three yet one, indivisible and avowedly incomprehensible!

But as we come to reflect on this doctrine and, above all, to worship the Trinity we begin to become enlightened. Here, for example, is (miracle of miracles) a committee that has been operating in a healthy, functional and productive way for a long, long, long, long time!

There are some, like Frank Allen, who have profound distaste or, at least, pervasive wariness of committees. Frank Allen once said, “A committee - a group of men who individually can do nothing but as a group decide that nothing can be done”. Or there is the apocryphal story of the jaded bishop who, as an ecclesiastical committee came to a close, closed his briefcase and commented, “Well, it is sure that I carried nothing into this meeting... and it is sure that I carry nothing out”.

And yet as we observe and celebrate and worship our Trinitarian God, we gaze upon a divine and eternal committee; a committee which, without our being patronizing or sycophantic, we will agree has done... “rather well”. And as we observe upon the blessed Trinity in action we join with a whole procession of Christian theologians (Irenaeus, Tertullian even, I believe, our friend John Calvin) who have argued that we understand the Trinity best as we observe the Trinity in action... so-called economic trinitarianism.

So as we observe this eternal and beautiful committee, what lessons are we taught for our own earthly committees which do not, will not, last as long as the divine committee... though it sometimes seems as if they might!

Lesson #1 – “be doers and not merely talkers”. Today’s first reading from Genesis describes the Trinity in action, each person actively involved in creation. In the beginning... the Spirit moving, brooding over the face of the earth. The Word accomplishing the very thing that it speaks... “he spoke and it was done”. In an age where truth, integrity, consistency is often at peril here is the true nature of Word – “he spoke and it was done”. The Spirit, the Word and, of course, the Creator over all and able to say of all... “this is good, this is very good”. Remember the story of W.C. Fields during the Second World War? When German U-Boats were causing tragic loss, Mr. Fields wrote to President Roosevelt, “Here is the solution... heat the ocean to boiling point and the u-boats will have to rise to the surface”. “But” asked the President, “how do we get the ocean to boiling point?”. And Mr. Fields answered, “Oh... I am only the ideas man”. On the divine committee there are no “only ideas people” – we see each person

actively involved in creation. May God preserve us all from “only ideas people” in any committees on which we serve!

Lesson #2 – “enjoy and cherish difference and diversity”. In many of his letters, St. Paul writes of the Holy Trinity in ways that suggest a richness and variety of nature and character – his second letter to the Corinthians, which we heard read today, is no exception. In chapter 13 he speaks of the gracious, tender nature of the Son; the firm, resolute and committed love of the Father and then of the healing, binding and reconciling Spirit committed to fellowship and unity. Homogeneity is one of the curses of political correctness; diversity one of the joys of the divine life. A committee packed with like-minded individuals may well produce that which is inoffensive and bland but it is unlikely to create out of a holy chaos that which is beautiful, pleasing and nourishing. Away with the pursuit of irreducible minimums; welcome to the acceptance of inexplicable richness. There is no commitment to dull conformity on the divine committee; may God preserve us from such on all earthly committees.

And Lesson #3 – “have a common purpose”. Despite the profusion of activity, despite the engagement of diversity, the divine committee has ultimately one purpose. Here there are no hidden agenda, here there are no over-riding and over-arching personal needs aching to be met. No... here there is, ultimately, one goal, one purpose, one end. Listen to today’s Gospel, “Go and make disciples of all nations... in the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. Is this not true... that in all the prolific and eternal busyness of the divine operations, this one goal is paramount... to draw men and women to Christ as His disciples and, thereby, ever to be enlarging the Kingdom of God? To serve on a committee which has no defined goal, or as many goals as committee members, is at best frustrating, at worst destructive. On the divine and eternal committee there is no room for other agendas except that one clearly stated; may God preserve us from such earthly committees.

When St. Augustine reflected upon the nature of the Trinity, he argued that this divine nature was reflected in many, many areas of life and in many, many aspect of our very personalities. Today we worship (I hope with excitement) the God who is Trinitarian – may our worship today cause our lives to confirm to His nature, our behaviour to His very being. AMEN