

Sermon 21 February 2010, Rev Nathalie Dürmüller  
1<sup>st</sup> Part of the Trilogy "Holy Trinity": God Father/Mother  
Texts: Genesis 1, 24-31, Mark 14, 32-42

Dear Parishioners

Would you be able to explain to someone who is a non-believer or practising another religion, what it actually means that we Christians believe in the Holy Trinity, even though we also believe in only one God? How would you make clear to that person that even though we believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - God is actually only one? I bet that most of you - if not all - are thinking: No, I wouldn't have a clue of how to explain that. It is a very, very difficult task to fulfil. Many Christian traditions say that the Holy Trinity is actually unexplainable and it is considered as a secret of faith. This difficulty of explaining the Trinity was already a problem in the Early Christian era. It took the first Christians 325 years until they could finally agree on the first concept and still the Orthodox Church split away from the main church as a result of these disagreements. I don't want to go into detail with what they agreed on in Constantinople that day, because to tell you the truth each time I try to follow all of their arguments I get completely lost. It is so complex! Also it is of course highly challenging to preach about this very subject. To make it a bit simpler I'll just preach about each aspect of the Trinity in each of the three coming services, and I will not so much reflect about how and why these three aspects of God are one, but more on the quality and speciality of each of them. So today we will have a closer look at the first part of the Holy Trinity: God the Father.

But there the problem starts: Why should God be attributed with being "the father". The other day a friend said to me, with for her, an unusual amount of assertiveness: "But you know that God is actually not male, God could as well be described as female." Of course I know! But still I often use the term "Father" when I pray to God – fully aware that we could as well use the term "Mother" instead – God has no gender, it is just God. That's why I try to take the two images into account during the ritual of the baptism. By saying to the child: "God will accompany you like a father and a mother" I make a point that God covers both images. But I have to say even though we can be a bit flexible when we are using both terms, the traditional image of God as the Father is still very strong

in our minds, don't you agree? For example we refer to God as he and not as she.

That's why I'm having a closer look at the roots of the term "Abba" the Aramaic word for "father". In the second reading of the Scripture we heard the passage in which Jesus actually called God "Abba". This was a unique instance in 1st Century Jewish piety! This explains why it stamped the apostles' memory and that's why we find it now in the description of the scene of Jesus in Gethsemane. In this very moment of despair and utter loneliness – all of his disciples had fallen asleep - Jesus called God "Father". We read in verse **36**

**"Abba,<sup>[e]</sup> Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."**

But why all this fuss about a simple Aramaic word? Modern biblical research has convincingly shown that —"Abba" actually means "Daddy"! This was completely shocking for the people from the first century: That was scandalous, blasphemous, crazy and unreal! Jesus called the Almighty One "Daddy"! He addressed God as a child would address his own father! And this means that a man of our own flesh and blood considered himself to be in a unique way the child of the Most High! This meant a spiritual revolution at the time and we today do good not to take the term "Father"/"Abba" for granted. It describes our very special relationship to God, which is based on love, forgiveness and trust. Because this is what Jesus' preaching about God was all about. What is also striking for me is that Jesus used this term when he must have felt completely abandoned in a moment right before his cruel death. So this shows us that we can follow Jesus example by turning to God in moments of despair and by calling him "Father".

But I'm also fully aware that the term "Father" is not for everyone necessarily linked with "love, forgiveness and trust". Many have not so good memories of their fathers and it is difficult for them to call God "Father". In our society fathers are often absent for many reasons be it work, divorce or other life circumstances. So sometimes children develop a closer relationship to their mothers and that's why the image of God as a "Mother" can be more helpful for some of us. This is why I have chosen the first reading of the Scripture, which shows God as the Creator of Heaven and Earth and as the creator of us human beings. Creating life is traditionally

linked with the female part of life. In Ancient Times when this Biblical text was written, people used to believe in Female Goddesses, which stood for fertility and prosperity. Compared to those traditions the text in Genesis chapter one is different, it makes it very clear that there are not many different Goddesses and Gods but that there is one God who created *everything* instead: The earth, the stars and the moon as well as everything that lives on that planet including us human beings. Compared to other religions at the time, which had different Gods for every aspect of life, this was revolutionary! Besides this what is extremely beautiful about this text is how the relationship between God and us human beings is described. Let us listen again to Genesis chapter one:

**27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**

**28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.**

What an incredibly high image of us human beings! According to this text we are created in the image of God. I don't know how you feel about this, but for me this is nearly too much. And I fear that human's hubris might creep in there somewhere. But on the other hand for those among us, who have maybe not a very high self-esteem this can feel like balm for the soul. Imagine: All of us are actually created after the image of God! This means that the intention of our creation is an absolutely positive one – we human beings are meant to be wonderful creatures! Of course if we read on in the Bible we will soon discover that something went wrong there, and when Adam blames Eve for having tempted him with the forbidden fruit, we know that human beings are far from being such wonderful and god-like creatures. Nonetheless I think with this text the fundament for a close and loving relationship between God and his creatures was laid. How could God want something bad for the one thing that he created after his own image?

Coming back to the image of God the creator with the motherly aspect to it, there is one more thing that I would like to mention. If we look at the text carefully it says in the English translation:  
**So God created *man* in his own image.**

Man is spelled M A N – so it is talking about one single man. In the original Hebrew text it says: Ha adam, which means “the man”.

The word “ha adam” reminds us of the story that I mentioned before about Adam and Eve in Paradise, their names translated mean literally “the man” and “the living one”. But besides this what is interesting about it is that the name Adam comes from the word “adamah”, which means “earth”. Therefore we find here an image of God creating Adam out of earth, which is also in line with the second creation account that follows a bit later in Genesis chapter two. Therefore it seems to me that we find here again a female image in the whole story about the creation. In many religious traditions the earth is called “Mother Earth”, so according to Genesis one, we human beings have been created out of mother earth in the image of God.

I believe that in our Christian tradition, that is so rich in images, we can without hesitation use two images to describe God: God the Father as well as God the Mother. In any case more important than the words we use to describe God is what these synonyms stand for. Both Mother and Father should stand for love, forgiveness and trust.

Amen