



Archbishop Stephen preached at Carlisle Cathedral service for Trinity Sunday, 12 June. This is part of the planned celebrations to mark its 900th anniversary. His sermon follows in full:

“(The Spirit),” says Jesus, will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

- John 16.15.

The oldest of all monastic rules, the rule of St Augustine, begins with these words -

You that are settled in the monastery, these are the things that we advise you to observe. In the first place - and this is the very reason for your being gathered together in one - you should live in the house in unity of spirit, and you should have one soul and heart centred on God.

The inspiration for these words is that passage from the Acts of the Apostles where we are told that the infant Church in Jerusalem is united in heart and soul and holds all things in common (see Acts 4.32).

To live the Rule of St Augustine was, therefore, to live as the very first Christians lived, being devoted ‘to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.’ (Acts 2.42) Or as Jesus says in today’s gospel, by the Holy Spirit all that is given and declared to Jesus is now shared with those who follow him and love him.

As you know Carlisle Cathedral began life as an Augustinian Priory in 1122. And although it became a cathedral just 11 years later, it is wise for us to remember on this 900th anniversary that the reason it was established was not, in the first place, to be a Cathedral, but to draw together a community that lived out the Christian vocation through following this particular rule, the Rule of Saint Augustine. This rule places great emphasis on being a community that lives in harmony, ‘being of one heart and mind on the way to God’, and understanding and embodying the fundamental Christian truth that love – love of God and love of neighbour – is the centre of the Christian life.

And although I have not been able to find out exactly why Carlisle Cathedral is dedicated to the Holy and Undivided Trinity, seen in the light of the Rule of Saint Augustine it is an obvious choice, not just because understanding of God as a community of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is foundational to understanding of the whole Christian faith, but because the monastic rule that Saint Augustine wrote is a practical example of how people might come together to live out this faith, which is nothing less than an invitation to enjoy community with God ourselves.

Put very simply, we are invited to live in harmony and to be of one heart and mind, because that is what we see in God.

When we Christians use the word 'God' we are thinking of the God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ – the one who is the loving, motherly father God, the creator of everything God. Completely God, he chooses to be completely human. The fullness of God's love and the invitation of God's grace is shared with us in the only language that we understand, that is the language of another human life, a life like ours. By his dying and rising Jesus makes access to God and community with God, possible and available. By the outpouring and the indwelling of the Spirit, he is with us now, so that now, here in this great cathedral church on this Sunday morning, we can live in harmony, and be of one heart and mind, not only with each other, but with God.

It is this faith and this invitation that this cathedral church has been living out and sharing with others for 900 years. This is all very good news. It is the reason we are gathered here today to give thanks.

Yes, it is a most remarkable building, and it is a most remarkable history, but it exists for a purpose which is the purpose of the gospel to help people in each generation know that they are not alone, that God is not remote or inaccessible, that in Jesus we can enjoy community with the God who is community, and that all that we long for in our own lives, to know harmony and peace with each other and with the earth, is itself a reflection, indeed even the thumbprint, of the God who made us in his image. Which means if God is this community of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit God, an ever giving and receiving reciprocity of love and goodness, then that is what we are meant to be too. It is how we are meant to live our lives. We are not meant to be isolated from each other. We are one humanity inhabiting one world. Which is why deporting frightened asylum seekers to Rwanda is not a great idea. And why we need to support areas of rural poverty and hard pressed west Cumbrian coastal towns (ones which I had the privilege of visiting with Bishop James recently) and why we are accountable one to another to build a better and more gracious and more just world.

Is there a more important message for our world today, where we again face war in Europe, where the earth itself cries out through rising sea levels, forest fire, flood, and famine. Where we are fearful of each other and for the future we bequeath to our children. We have to work together to build and keep peace. We have to recognise our responsibilities to each other. And see how they flow from our community with God. We Christians have a particular responsibility to live and share this message of peace. And show the world what it looks like.

Jesus said that people will be able to recognise his followers by the ways in which we love each other, our lives mirroring the love of God we see in Trinity.

Let us make this our priority.

Athelwold, the first Prior and then the first bishop of Carlisle, set up a community here 900 years ago for this purpose. We receive the baton from him and from all those other faithful women and men who have served and worshipped here down the centuries. But the reason we are here and the message we share has not changed one bit. We may not be settled in a monastery, but we are invited into a Christian community, and the reason we are gathered together is that we should live in unity of spirit and should have one soul and one heart centred on God.

For the sake of the world, and for the sharing of the Gospel, and for the building of God's kingdom here, we give thanks to God, the Holy and Undivided Trinity, and commit ourselves on this great feast and anniversary to seek such lives of peace, understanding, harmony and goodwill ourselves.

If we did this, sisters and brothers, we would change the world.

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Find out more about the [900 Anniversary Journey and Rest, 1122 - 2022: 900 years of Carlisle Priory and Cathedral](https://www.archbishopofyork.org/speaking-and-writing/carlisle-cathedral-900th-anniversary-celebrations).

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