

The Pro-Cathedral of Holy Trinity Brussels

Europe Day - Sunday 9 May 2010

John 14: 23-29

Today is the 60th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration. On 9th May 1950, the French Foreign Secretary Robert Schuman made his historic statement at the French foreign office. There were only a few journalists present, no cameras, no recordings.... yet this simple read statement would change the history of Europe – and so many of our lives. Just for a moment I would like to ask a few simple questions:

How many of you were born and bred in Belgium? Please put your hand up

How many of you were born and bred outside of Europe – anywhere but Europe ?

How many of you were born in bred in Europe?

Something has happened to Brussels in the last two generations. As we worship in English at Holy Trinity, there are churches across the city worshipping in Polish, in Greek, in German, in Romanian, in Swedish, in so many other languages. The Brussels of today is the capital of Europe, - one of the handful of emerging global capitals of the 21st century. It is home to the EU institutions, to NATO, and to numerous other organisations with a global reach. Brussels has the highest concentration of diplomats and journalists anywhere in the world.

And it all began on this day 60 years ago. Schuman was a deeply committed Roman Catholic who longed for peace in Europe. He and his generation had lived through two world wars, they had seen their continent torn apart twice. And as 1950 approached an even more terrible nuclear third world war was threatening.

Longing for peace Schuman proposed that the means of making war - coal and steel should be pooled and put under a common high authority - so no single nation could ever again rely on its own coal and steel to declare war. Schuman's main concern was France and Germany, but all the other nations of Europe were invited to join in. The Schuman Declaration led to the birth of the European Coal and Steel Community and eventually the EU as we know it today with all its strengths and its weaknesses.

Schuman was not alone – he was part of a generation of Christian statesmen - De Gasperi, Monnet and Adenauer who longed and worked and prayed for peace. Before one important conference in Paris – they all went off to a monastery to pray for the negotiations to come.

Underpinning their work Schuman and his peers believed that men and women were made in the image of God, that all people have an inviolable sacred worth, and that they are called to live in love and peace. For Schuman peace was fundamentally important for human

flourishing, for community, for solidarity, for allowing the rich to help the poor and for the strong to help the weak – for the loving of ones neighbour as oneself.

Our gospel reading set for this morning is very appropriate. Jesus is speaking to his disciples and although they do not know it, he is giving them yet another glimpse into the divine life of God. In these brief verses Jesus speaks of each of the members of the Trinity, the Father, *My Father*, he speaks of being sent by the Father and of bringing the Fathers message. He speaks of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter who is to come, who will come in the name of Jesus and who will remind you of me and my teaching. Here the roles and the actions of the Father, Son and Holy Spirits so intertwined that they are impossible to separate.

It is a picture of the closeness and the intimacy of the internal life of God. The God who is One, and yet who is an undivided divine community of three persons. I rejoice that as a church we are called Holy Trinity, because our very name is an ever constant reminder of who God is.

As Christians we often behave as though this doctrine is just too difficult to think about – and does it matter anyway? I would want to say that it matters hugely to our human flourishing and to our experience of being made in the image of God.

For seven years I was on the staff of Church Army's College in Sheffield and every term we would spend a day being quiet.....many of our students struggled with the quiet and at the end of the day when we were allowed to speak, there would be a lot of speaking and laughter and fun. At the end of one quiet day as we were all queuing up for our cup of tea...one of the students shouted out to the Principal, who taught doctrine.....so David how do you understand the trinity.....David who was a brilliant teacher of Christian doctrine replied very quickly...you don't have to understand it...you have to live it.... [repeat]

In the Trinity we see a community of total commitment and interdependence between the three persons of the God-head. In our gospel reading this morning – we see a glimpse of the overflow of divine life... the overflow of love and the overflow of peace....

In verse 23 Jesus speaks of the overflow of Gods love to men and women....and that he will come and make his home in the heart of the believer. In verse 27 he says *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.* ..Jesus offers to men and women, a peace that does not come from human effort but overflows from the peace that is enjoyed by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Made in the image of God, we are made to live in community, we are made to demonstrate love to our neighbour and we are called to live in peace. But more than that we are made to be made alive and energised by the love and peace that overflow from the God who is Trinity. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.*

Given that that Schuman and the other founding fathers were such committed Christians it is not surprising that the language of the early European community was full of references to community, solidarity, and peace, that concern for the weaker neighbour was a powerful motivation. For the founding fathers the creation of the European Community was the translation of their Christian faith into economic, political and social reality.

Schuman's modest statement has born remarkable fruit – a union of 27 member states with a population of 500 million and the only multi-national parliament in the world. The population of Europe has prospered, the EU is a global player, with a substantial aid budget, and peace between nations now the norm in Europe. The second world war is now three generations ago – and war between France and Germany is inconceivable.

Despite its successes the EU is mostly unloved. We are often more aware of its failings rather we are its strengths. Its weaknesses are the similar to those of our national governments, even local government but they are so much easier to see because they are magnified across a whole continent. The EU is not a country – it doesn't have a government – it doesn't have a natural focus of loyalty. The EU is hard to understand and its hard to have any loyalty to its leaders.....what does the President of the Commission do...and how does he relate to the President of the Council and how does he relate to the President of the Parliament. How do I relate to any of them?

Many of us will know something of the complexities and frustrations of the Belgian constitution. Often there is no national government. In Belgian there seems to be little loyalty to the federal state, but the King of the Belgians is much loved. Loyalty to him does much to hold the nation together.

Europe Day is May 9th.....yesterday May 8th was VE Day, the 65th Celebration of Peace in Europe. On UK news programmes – Prince Charles was seen laying a wreath at the cenotaph in memory of those who have given their lives for peace. It was a quiet reminder of a time when the purpose of government was so much simpler, of a time when whole populations were united in their pursuit of victory in the second world war

Sixty-five years later the task of government is hugely more complicated and populations much less united. The general election in the UK on Thursday 6th May, may have marked the end of single party government in the UK. Perhaps never again will the population of the UK be able to unite around a single cause or a shared set of values...?

On May 9th 1950, when Schuman made his declaration Europe was undoubtedly vulnerable and worried by the prospect of a third world war. Peace was the key issue for both governments and peoples. Now that war is a beyond deeply faded memory for most

Europeans we are faced with the hugely complex task of finding purpose and values for a continent that has become used to peace and prosperity.

As Christians we need to be energised and shaped by the divine life of the God who is Trinity. We were made to live in community with God and with our fellow human beings and for love to flow out of that community into the world. We were made to be in solidarity with those who are weak and vulnerable. We were made to bring peace where there is strife. If we are not sure about this....we only have to look again to Jesus words....

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.

Today as we mark the 60th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration we need to rejoice in the naming of this Church after the Holy Trinity. And maybe we need to set more time aside to grapple with this fundamental doctrine and to enter more fully into the life that God holds out to us.

Today we also need to rejoice in the Christian foundations of the European Union – to give thanks to God for the lives of Robert Schuman and his peers - and perhaps to be a little quicker to remind others of the very values that gave birth and life to the European Union.

For those of us who work in and around the institutions of the EU, today is a reminder to live out our faith in our work and relationships and to bring our beliefs to bear more fully on our work

For those of us who do not work in or around the institutions of the EU, today is a reminder to pray for those who lead and work in the EU from MEP assistants to the Presidents of the Institutions.

Someone once said at the beginning of a Church interregnum. 'You get the vicar you pray for'. 'If you don't pray much, you don't get much of a vicar'. I think the same applies to the EU...if we don't pray much for the EU we don't get much of an EU. Please do remember to pray for the EU – and not least for the officials who are part of this Holy Trinity community. Amen.

Gary Wilton