

Sunday Homily

4th SUNDAY OF EASTER

8 MAY 2022

YEAR C

"The Father and I are one."

John 10:30

Illustration

How's your waltz these days? What about your salsa? Are you one of the many people who can be spotted tripping the light fantastic in an old school hall on a Thursday night? Formal dancing of all kinds seems to be undergoing a popular revival, partly, no doubt, because it's a little more interesting than the gym, and a great way to keep fit. But more than that, the recent revival of TV programmes that feature dancing, in one way or another, shows that even those who can't or won't take to the floorboards can enjoy watching it being done. There is something rather wonderful about the spectacle of a good dance: the glamorous costumes; the pace and movement; the way that two people can move so close and so quickly, and yet somehow manage not to step on one another. It's no wonder it makes great TV entertainment.

Gospel Teaching

But not only is it great entertainment: the image of a dance is an ancient and sometimes forgotten model that has something useful to bring to some of the claims Jesus makes for himself, such as the one we read at the end of our Gospel reading. "The Father and I are one," he says. Just six little words that sum up what John's Gospel is all about. John wants us to know that Jesus relates to God in a different way from that in which humankind had related to God before and that, because of this, the universe will never be the same again.

But the fact that Jesus can sum up his relationship to God in six little words does not make it easy to understand. The question of who Jesus was, and exactly how he related to God, stretched past Jesus' day into the first hundred years of the Christian faith and beyond. Right up to the present day in fact. When Jesus said, "The Father and I are one," he laid out a blueprint for the transformation of our lives. But he also set off centuries of debate about what this actually meant, and what it means for us.

And this is where the image of the dance comes in. As the early Church debated what it all meant, one of the models that they came up with in order to explain the relationship of Jesus to God was the dance. In a dance, the participants move as one, but they remain separate individuals with a distinct part to play. Before Jesus, the relationship of God to humankind had been characterised by a kind of awesome separation. God was too holy, too completely other, to be approached

directly. Those who did come close to God generally tended to fall flat on their faces and fear for their lives. But in the God/man Jesus, all that is changed. For the first time in history, a human being was able to stand before God without flinching – in bold and lively partnership in fact. “The Father and I are one,” Jesus says, and the world is changed for ever. The relationship of God to his people is transformed from an awesome separation to an intimate independence.

Application

We do not have those qualities that Jesus had – his divine qualities – that enabled him to bring about this shift in divine/human relations. But if we believe, then the unique nature of Jesus’ relation to God changes the way that we relate to God too. This is a shocking truth that many, many Christians do not have the courage to claim for themselves: in Christ we are partners in the dance. It’s not unusual to hear Christians talk of our relationship to God as if we were infants – completely dependent on God, with little life and thought of our own. And while this may be a suitable metaphor for some of us at some time in our lives, it does not do justice to John’s Gospel, and the relationships he is trying to describe.

Through belief in Christ, we enter a partnership with God that is characterised by intimate independence. Think of those dancers on TV, sweeping round the dance floor. Sometimes they move together as one person. Sometimes they part for a few moments as each of them moves on their own. Always they are together, but each has something special to do. So it is with us. Because we believe, we can stand tall before God, just as we are, and rise to the challenge of his call as partners in the divine dance.