He’s thirteen, though he looks younger (eight maybe nine). He lives on the streets of Racife, Brazil. But it doesn’t matter what city it is. It’s every city. Naming it only makes a scapegoat out of one of them. We have heard too much recently about grooming in a number of cities in the UK; even in Oxford. The boy has food because he has sex with anyone who will pay. The sex is cheap; the price of an on-offer MacDonald’s. He has food now as he staggers late at night around the corner of a piazza, with others like him, slightly older, slightly younger, girls and boys. He staggers with a polystyrene tray of food in one hand and a used Coke bottle in the other, full of glue. He staggers because he’s inhaling the glue. If he inhales enough it will get him through the night; if he inhales too much it will get him through a much longer night. And it’s all the same to him.

Now today is Trinity Sunday, and it’s the liturgical culmination of the year, but if the doctrines of the Trinity can’t speak to that boy’s situation – and on some days I’m truly not sure – then it would be better for us all to pack up and find some secular forms of consolation (though they’re often more expensive). So how does the foundational teaching of the Church, the celebration of the triune nature of God, respond to, not resolve, but respond to the plight of some of our youngest and most vulnerable people in a world of forces that are stronger than they are?

I’m going to make two points, and neither of them are without complexity from our human point of view; that is, from the limitations of our understanding. Our thoughts are not God’s thoughts and there is a painful, painful scrutiny involved with trying to discern the secret ways of God’s providence. But this we have to stand by: God is love (first point) and Jesus Christ as God’s eternally begotten Son made flesh came in order to save us from ourselves (point two). This Son is the Logos and associated by long tradition with the wisdom of God spoken about in our first reading from Proverbs. Salvation in Latin is salus, and that means health and wellbeing.
Upon the acceptance of and faith in these two points – which I don’t minimize takes some courage and some stretch of the human imagination – rests the possibility of responding to the situation of that adolescent in his Latin American favela. And there’s no use me trying to convince you that I would be able to help him by sitting him down and telling him about these two points. But thankfully, salvation is God’s job not mine; the work of God’s inscrutable grace.

It is the work of that grace which is Trinitarian; that is, the work is an expression of the eternal nature of God as love. In our second reading this morning Paul speaks of the “God of love and peace.” It is because of the circulations of an intra-trinitarian loving, composing the unity of the Godhead, that all proceeding from that love is an act of love: all things are from God and in God and belong to God, are never separated from God and so will return to God. In fact, they never left God. But you can’t tell materialists like Richard Dawkins that. And you probably can’t tell that young man in Racife that either – but for very different reasons. But as St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: “I am convinced that there is nothing… nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This love, this Trinitarian love, is present and continuously, saving us. We begin our life in Christ being baptised “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” – a formula as old as Christianity itself. We confess belief in the Triune God in every Christian liturgy. We confess it because first we live it. We live the Trinity in every act of love and so the Trinity is written into our very experience of God. It’s not something we can argue for or against. We live what we don’t understand; but what’s unusual about that? Whatever gravity is, the physicists and cosmologists are still trying to discover. It doesn’t stop us living the conditions that gravity makes possible. The Trinity is the condition for all that is possible in creation as we have it as an act of love. And in our liturgical life, as in our salvation, we celebrate and acknowledge our participation in the circulations of that Trinitarian love. Not easily; but we do. And it is that participation which relates us to that adolescent lost among the streets of a Brazilian city or to the destitute and estranged children in our own cities. While one suffers we all suffer. There is no full human redemption for any of us while there remains one human being who is bound, imprisoned or captive. In our humanity we are one.

I said the participation in the Triune God in our liturgical life is not an easy one. I want to explain that. In our liturgies we are joining ourselves with angels and archangels and all the saints who have gone before us. We join them in acts of worship that transcend
this time and this place. They are cosmic in significance. But Christianity is found upon a God who gave himself sacrificially to the violences that so characterise the world as we have made and know it. This is important when we are faced with the tragedies and appalling violences that as fallen and fallible human beings we will find ourselves caught up in until Christ comes. This, the church, is the place where we bring brokenness – our brokenness, the brokenness of those around us and among us, and the brokenness of the world, to the Christ who was broken for us. That we may be healed - all of us - by His wounding, by His offering of Himself, God Himself, pouring out His Triune divinity for our salvation, *salus*, health, wellbeing out of love. That doesn’t mean we offer up our prayers, sit back and just let the love of God do its work. We are the love of God; we live that Trinitarian love (however flawed and paltry that loving is in us). Its transformative work within us means that we do the works that love within us demands. Our act of love, for that young man in the *favela*, is to bring that brokenness into our liturgical life; bring that brokenness to the Christ who was broken for us.

As I said at the beginning: that does not resolve his plight or the destitute lives of so many of the young on our own streets. It doesn’t answer their situations. But we are praying in Christ, praying as Christ in us, for their salvation – for their inclusion in the circulations of God’s Triune love and peace. We pray because we enter Christ’s own prayer for them. As Wisdom testifies in our reading this morning: “My delight was in humankind.”