

Readings for Trinity Sunday

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy:

Moses said to the people: "Ask now of the days of old, before your time, ever since God created man upon the earth; ask from one end of the sky to the other: Did anything so great ever happen before? Was it ever heard of? Did a people ever hear the voice of God speaking from the midst of fire, as you did, and live? Or did any god venture to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, with strong hand and outstretched arm, and by great terrors, all of which the LORD, your God, did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? This is why you must now know, and fix in your heart, that the LORD is God in the heavens above and on earth below, and that there is no other. You must keep his statutes and commandments that I enjoin on you today, that you and your children after you may prosper, and that you may have long life on the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you forever."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 33:4-5, 6, 9, 18-19, 20, 22

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

Upright is the word of the LORD, and all his works are trustworthy. He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the Lord the earth is full.

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made; by the breath of his mouth all their host. For he spoke, and it was made; he commanded, and it stood forth.

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

See, the eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness, To deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

Our soul waits for the Lord, who is our help and our shield. May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us who have put our hope in you.

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:14-17

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans:

Brothers and sisters: For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Matthew 28:16-20

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they all saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Trinity Sunday

Each year, on the feast of the Holy Trinity, I face a dilemma. On what will I preach? Do I teach a lesson or preach a homily? The feast of the Trinity is a doctrinal, theological feast that is at the heart of our faith in God. The mystery of God is profound and rich with nuance, but today's readings bear the same characteristics. Since I am not bound, in a reflection, by constraints of time and people's attention span, I may be able to address both aspects, the scripture and dogma of Trinity Sunday.

God is one with three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is one not a set of three. How three equals one is not a math problem. It expresses the mystery that God is much more than we can sense, visualize or imagine. God is infinite, eternal, compassionate, all powerful and unconditional. As far beyond us as God is, God is never beyond belief or experience. When the bishops, in their wisdom, revised our liturgy with a new translation, the word "consubstantial" reentered our usage. It means, literally, with one substance. Put it more colloquially, Father, Son

and Holy Spirit are made of the same stuff. Consubstantial deals with the what of God. Person deals with the who of God.

The Trinity is the way that the Christian Church has come to experience, know, believe and recognize God. We can find Jesus himself speak of the Trinity. He referred to God as the Father, calling God Abba. Abba is a Hebrew word best translated as Dad, Daddy or Papa. These are very intimate words. I know a young man who has never met his father. His grandfather raised him to manhood. The young fellow has always called him dad. I asked him why and he said, "Any man can be a father. Only one who can love can be a dad." His answer colored my perception of Jesus' choice of words. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit when he returned to his Dad. Father, Son and Spirit come from the mouth of Jesus himself.

In the Old Testament there is no explicit mention of a Trinity. There are only hints. Abraham was visited by three men. From our perspective of faith, we can interpret them as representing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is a famous Russian Icon of that event painted by the monk Andrei Rublev, the Trinity or Mystical Supper. It is one of my favorites. Further information on this and a picture of the icon can be found on Wikipedia. It's worth the read.

Saint Paul also spoke of the Trinity. He used the words God the Father, Lord and Spirit. I note well that the letters of Paul are the earliest written record contained in the New Testament referring to the Mystery of the Trinity. In 1 Corinthians (12:3) we read, "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." In Philippians (2:11) we also read, "Every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Belief in the Holy Trinity dates to the apostolic age.

However, the theology as we know it was not defined until the Fourth Century at the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 of the Common Era (AD). Today we recite the Church belief each time we pray the Nicene Creed. When we talk of personhood and substance, we can get lost. Our experience is in our real lives and not in a "spiritual realm." As person, we are all separate people. As creatures we are made of matter made up of atoms, molecules and living cells. God is not bound to our physical, emotional, intellectual or interpersonal limitations. God is pure spirit. God has created the cosmos and everything and everyone in it. God raised up a people to serve him. Jesus was born, as one like us, to die on the cross and to rise from the dead. God saved us through Jesus' actions. After Jesus returned to the Father, he sent the Spirit to enlighten, inspire and guide God's people. God is love. The love of the Father was so great the Father begot the Son. The Father and the Son loved so much that together they breathed the Holy

Spirit. The three source words from Hebrew, Greek and Latin are “ruah,” “pneuma” and “Spiritus.” They all mean, in English, breath. Breath is a sign of life, along with a pulse. God is a living and dynamic being. The Hebrew name for God, “YHWH,” has roots in the verb to be. We translate God’s name as “I AM.” This is a simple thumbnail lesson, not the complete teaching of the Catholic Church. I still want to delve into the scriptures.

The first reading is from the book of Deuteronomy. The name means the second giving of God’s law. The first giving of it took place in the book of Exodus. I found the tone of its story to be a bit ominous. Can hearing God’s voice kill us? Does God really wage war? Does God’s outstretched arm bring terror to people? Is God’s command to follow all he commands an actual threat? I am often uncomfortable with images portraying God as angry, vengeful and fierce. Yet there is a context. This is our God and we are God’s beloved children. God is for us; never against us. God desires salvation for sinners. God’s people have witnessed God’s work, signs and wonders working on their behalf. We live today in a post Easter and post Pentecost world. It is critical for us to understand this passage in light of what God has already done for us. If anyone has been chased by a goose at nesting time, their ferocity is to protect their own.

The image of God we find in Romans is much different. We are called beloved daughters and sons of God. God’s relationship to us is intimate. We can call God Papa. I like this word better than daddy. It has a soft, linguistic feel akin to the Hebrew word, Abba. Children are heirs to what their parents have. What do we inherit from God? We now share in God’s life. God helps us to live in this life. We also share in God’s eternal life. Because we have God’s gift of faith, we have the promise of eternal life with God when we die. When Jesus returns at the end of the age, God’s Kingdom will be fulfilled. We are heirs to that too.

Why do we have the need to suffer? Why does he say that suffering is a requirement for eternal life? Paul tried to make a connection between Jesus’ sufferings and our own. He has said that we can make up what lacks in the suffering of Jesus with our suffering. Nothing was lacking in Jesus’ cross. We can add nothing to God, from whom we have all come. Paul has tried to make a powerful link between our lives and Jesus. Jesus having lived and died as a human being knows what we go through, having gone through it himself. Paul has tried to show another way for us to connect to Jesus’ life. We can know Jesus even when we suffer. Jesus is only a thought away.

The last chapter (28) of Matthew is very short, only twenty verses. In it Matthew told the story of Jesus’ resurrection and appearances. There are a few details that

differ from the other gospels' details. The disciples believed the women who found Jesus' tomb empty and encountered Jesus, himself, on the run home. Matthew verified the resurrection against the malicious propaganda of the authorities. The eleven lads witnessed the Risen Jesus at home, in Galilee. The gospel ended with Jesus' promise to remain with them always to the end of the age. There is no account of Jesus' leaving and return to the Father. Jesus' promise to remain verifies, I believe, what Paul said about suffering. To suffer is human. Jesus' promise has bound him to us in his human experience. With his promise, as God, Jesus remains present in our lives, even our suffering can become holy.

All three of today's readings have one thing in common. They tell us of God's presence in the lives of God's people. It can be a living, healing, forgiving and saving presence. God abides in us as we abide in God. The times in Deuteronomy seemed to be times of upheaval and violence. Aren't ours now the same? Paul's letter conveys the need for community. God lives and nourishes the community of believers as a family. Haven't we longed for that during the pandemic as we have had to keep socially distant? The women and disciples in the gospel encountered the Risen Jesus, unexpectedly, as they lived their lives. Don't we too when we need Jesus to be near? These stories reflect ours. Jesus has promised to us that he is with us always.

May we know God's presence, always.

James D. Beath
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