

Sunday, May 30, 2021

The Holy Trinity, Year B

Prayer of the Day

Almighty Creator and ever-living God: we worship your glory, eternal Three-in-One, and we praise your power, majestic One-in-Three. Keep us steadfast in this faith, defend us in all adversity, and bring us at last into your presence, where you live in endless joy and love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

This reading narrates Isaiah's vision of the Lord surrounded by angels. They sing "Holy, holy, holy," a song the church sings at the beginning of the great thanksgiving. This liturgical text invites the church and all creation to sing in praise of God's glory. That glory is God's mercy toward sinners.

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Psalm: Psalm 29

Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. (Ps. 29:2)

¹Ascribe to the | LORD, you gods,
ascribe to the LORD glo- | ry and strength.

²**Ascribe to the LORD the glory | due God's name;
worship the LORD in the beau- | ty of holiness.**

³The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of | glory thunders;
the LORD is upon the | mighty waters.

⁴**The voice of the LORD is a pow- | erful voice;
the voice of the LORD is a | voice of splendor. R**

⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the | cedar trees;
the LORD breaks the ce- | dars of Lebanon;

⁶**the LORD makes Lebanon skip | like a calf,
and Mount Hermon like a | young wild ox.**

⁷The voice | of the LORD
bursts forth in | lightning flashes.

⁸**The voice of the LORD | shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilder- | ness of Kadesh. R**

⁹The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe and strips the | forests bare.
And in the temple of the LORD all are | crying, “Glory!”

¹⁰**The LORD sits enthroned a- | bove the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king for- | evermore.**

¹¹O LORD, give strength | to your people;
give them, O LORD, the bless- | ings of peace. R

Second Reading: Romans 8:12-17

In describing the new life of faith, Paul refers to all three persons of the Trinity: the Spirit leads us to recognize that we are children of God the Father and joint heirs with Christ the Son.

¹²Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—
¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the
deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of
God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have
received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing
witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of
God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be
glorified with him.

Gospel: John 3:1-17

Jesus’ miracles prompt Nicodemus to visit him in secrecy. Jesus tells him about being born of the Spirit and about the Son who has been sent by God to save.

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus
by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from
God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus
answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being
born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having
grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus
answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being
born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit
is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The
wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it
comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a

teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Sermon

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

Last Sunday – The Day of Pentecost – we were introduced to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The Spirit was poured out on many who came to believe that Jesus came to offer salvation to all who call upon him.

We often look at that moment in time as the birth of the church as the disciples of Jesus began individual missions to spread the good news and establish worshipping communities centered in houses of believers.

And now – one week later – we are gifted with Holy Trinity Sunday. We’ve spoken volumes about God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit and we gather to celebrate what we know as the Trinity – the Triune God.

As one who has preached on Holy Trinity Sunday for decades I’m here to tell you that I will not attempt to explain, once and for all, all there is to know about the Trinity. There are any number of volumes of books by world-renowned theologians you can try to wade through that hopefully enlighten you about the Trinity. Spoiler Alert – Do Not attempt to read any of these just prior to sleeping. You’re not likely to live long enough to make it through to the end of the shortest, most readable book. I’ve always believed that to try and wade too deeply into the mystery of the Trinity is skirting heresy and perhaps unwittingly crossing the line.

That being said, I have always appreciated a few ways of looking at the Trinity. One is – three masks, three faces of God. You may recall that when ancient Greeks performed plays, they held masks up to their faces. From the expression on the mask the audience knew a great deal about the character portrayed. The Trinity’s masks/faces are: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Another way to perceive of this three in oneness is the Greek term “perichoresis” – which translated means “dancing in a circle.” Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dance in an embrace so intimate and graceful that human observers can scarcely distinguish one

from another, One can't know the true God without knowing all three persons, however, and one can't truly know any of the persons apart from the other.

Last week I said that when we speak of the Holy Spirit we are speaking about the mysterious to a large degree. And that same holds true, and perhaps even more so, when we begin speaking about the Trinity. Mystery surrounds the Trinity always. It is easy to wander into that mystery and become lost, even disoriented.

Our texts today speak to that ongoing mystery so very well. Our first reading – Isaiah. Isaiah is in the temple, the place is filled with incense smoke, and he is overcome by his own spiritual frailty, standing before the enormity and holiness of God.

We find his imagination begins working overtime and he sees all sorts of heavenly sights and beings. His vision is truly a mystery field day. And then, the most important thing of all: God assures him that even though he is one of the unclean lips living among a multitude of those with unclean lips, all is forgiven, and he is just the one to serve God as a prophet. And overcome, Isaiah responds, “Send me.” Now that's mysterious.

And then in Romans, Paul speaks of a God who wants to be on familiar terms: “Abba, Father” – call me “Papa.” Even though, again, humanity is reminded of its proclivity to live according to the sinful flesh, Paul – who is certainly speaking from firsthand experience – says that's all in the past. We are children, heirs, who are loved and capable of loving. Again, pretty mysterious.

And then to the gospel text and Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a well-schooled teacher and Pharisee and seems to have lost his ability to understand a metaphor. He cannot figure out how it might be possible for one to be born again. Jesus tells him a mystery. But if you think that's mysterious, try this one on: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

You may be asking: “What's the point?” Well, the point is this: Just because it's Holy Trinity Sunday, today is no more or less mysterious than any other day with God. Try as we might to comprehend this one-in-three, three in one God of ours, you and I don't do this through our own effort or strength.

Instead, the Holy Spirit calls us and draws us to Jesus, the only begotten one. We are so loved that the One-in-Three longs to have us – you and me – heirs that we are -in this ongoing dialogue. We are so loved that this God of mystery, this God-in-three-persons-blessed-Trinity will come again and again, knocking at the door and enlisting us to join in the prophetic work of loving and serving others and the world. Pretty mysterious.

Personally, I can't explain it simply because mystery cannot be explained. It is only experienced. As I think on the mystery of the Trinity, I think about the mystery, the miracle we say, of childbirth.

We can explain it in terms of human reproduction, anatomy and physiology but there remains a part of the experience that is mystery as we contemplate how God made the bodies of females so allow childbirth to happen. We can explain it to a point, but allow the miracle, the mystery to bring us peace and joy.

And as we try to accept and appreciate the mystery that surrounds the Trinity and other elements of our faith life, our job, as it were, is to be witnesses to where and how we have seen and known mystery at work – in our life, in the life of our community, and in the world we are called to serve.

Again, we can point to a baby being born or a follower of Jesus dying, or perhaps a first grader bringing a whole congregation to its knees with a witness of love so tender that God is undeniably at work. We could point to the person leaving a foodbank, whom you saw taking half of her weekly allotment and sharing it at the bus stop with a friend who could not bring herself to step up to the line.

There are the times when the dance of the Trinity and the embrace of our God is so intimate and graceful that the only way we can possibly know that this is the God who loves us is to be born again. Born again as Isaiah was when the purifying coals touched his unclean lips; as the Roman Christians were when Paul convinced them that as heirs of the risen One, God would love to continue a loving, intimate conversation with them into the next world and beyond. Jesus called Nicodemus to be born again and told him that the only life worth living was the one into which he was inviting him. In all these lives today, we see that God who refuses again and again to condemn the world but comes to save it.

And I dare say, that certainly goes for us today. Instead of fussing about all that we don't know and understand about this Trinitarian God we serve, we ought to instead relish the mystery. We should continue to allow and trust the mystery of God to work in and through us, guiding us into situations where we, like Isaiah, simply respond by saying, "Send me." Send me on my way not knowing all the details, but trusting God to provide for all we need to accomplish the task we undertake.

If we are someone who only deals with facts and needs everything buttoned up tightly – if we need no loose ends, we may forever not be able to bask in the presence of God and mystery that surround our God. How very sad that would be for us. Revel in the mystery. Allow God – trust our mysterious God of love and mercy to lead us in this life and beyond.

Mysterious? You bet. But that's as real as it gets for followers of the Triune God.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Let us come before the triune God in prayer.

A brief silence.

We pray, O God, for your holy church around the world. Revitalize and renew us, that we may be reborn once again through the waters of baptism and the blowing wind of your Spirit. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We give you thanks for your power revealed to us in creation; for cedar and oak trees, for rushing waters, for the echoes of thunder. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for the nations and our leaders, that led by your Spirit, they work towards a world where all of your children enjoy peace. We pray especially for (*nations currently experiencing war or turmoil may be named*). Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for healing for all those who suffer, especially victims and survivors of trauma or violence. Give respite to those living with PTSD or any other mental health concerns. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for this worshiping community (*congregation/community may be named*), that the splendor of your majesty and the holiness of your mystery may be glorified through our worship and our relationships with one another. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We give you thanks, O God, for those who have died in the faith (*especially*). We remember also those whose lives have been lost due to the horrors of war. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your abiding grace.

Amen.