

## Trinity Sunday – Year A

Today's Scripture readings do not directly address or focus on the mystery of the Holy Trinity as a doctrine of one God in three divine persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Hebrew Scriptures present God functioning primarily as Creator but also as 'word,' 'wisdom' and 'spirit' and in the New Testament there is the language of Father, Son and Spirit. These expressions and concepts form the seedbed of what later developed as a doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

**Exodus 34: 4-6, 8-9** These verses represent God's response to the questions of Moses who asked that he might know God's ways and experience the divine glory. His questions are found in the previous chapter of Exodus. We learn in the divine answer that God is gracious and compassionate, slow to get angry and rich in kindness and loyalty. These are not beliefs or doctrinal expressions. They are terms of relationship. God is essentially about relationship and interaction with creation, and for us God is best seen and experienced in creation and especially in the people we encounter in our daily lives.

### **Moses is emphasising that forgiveness is a characteristic attribute of God's personality**

Moses responds in the same terms of relationship, pointing out that his people are headstrong and difficult and so are easily capable of trampling on relationships with their God and with each other. He pleads for divine forgiveness, confident in the proven reality that Israel's God is known as a God of forgiveness. In this verse Moses is emphasising that forgiveness is a characteristic attribute of God's personality.

We could be reminded here of the divine promise to Moses in Exodus 6 that God would lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and bring them to a land of their own and that they would have only the one God, in contrast to other peoples who have many gods and goddesses that reside in temples. That divine promise included the adoption of the Israelites as God's own people.

**Daniel 3:52-56** The blessings in this extract are not from a psalm but from additions to the book of Daniel, which was written shortly before 164 BCE. The scene described here is looking back six centuries to the exile of the Jews in Babylon. Three young Jewish men who served as administrators of the king, Nebuchadnezzar, refused to worship the Babylonian gods and were thrown into a fiery furnace. They survived the ordeal and sang a song in praise of God. These verses are quotes from their song.

**2 Corinthians 13:11-13** This is Paul's sign off at the end of his second letter to the Christian community in Corinth. The letter itself had been painful as Paul's relationship with this church had become strained. He had been accused of being a weak apostle, suffering too much, not having an impressive speaking presence, being unreliable and changing his plans. Paul argued in the letter that he was following in the footsteps of Jesus who was accused of teaching false doctrine and who was arrested and ignominiously crucified. Paul argued that in God's eyes human weakness could shape up as strength and he was happy to appear weak in imitation of Christ.

He wishes the community well, a fairly common sign-off wish, and bids them put things in their community in order. It amounts to saying, get things back on track. Known for his spirit of encouragement, he urges the Corinthians to encourage one another, to be supportive of each other.

### **Paul recommends the community listen to each other so they can live in peace**

Appreciating how unity through being of the same mind brings harmony to a community Paul recommends the community listen to each other so they can live in peace. The result of these positive steps will mean the God of love and peace will dwell in your midst.

The implication of these particular entreaties is that the Corinthian has a way to go before they can achieve an appreciable level of restoration and harmony. There is a note of, 'pull yourselves together' in Paul's final recommendations,

In light of the custom of having Paul's letters read out at a community gathering it is most likely that the reader asked those present to greet one another with the kind of embrace or hug that Paul would

have given them had he been present. The kiss of peace was a very early part of the community Eucharistic gathering.

Paul then feels he can speak for the Christian communities he was connected with and passes on their greetings. He concludes with a Trinitarian formula as he wishes on the Corinthians the gracious and compassionate care of the Lord Jesus Christ, the unlimited love of God and the intimate relationship of the Holy Spirit.

**John 3:16-18** The conversation between Jesus and the Pharisee, Nicodemus, is unique to John's gospel. In this episode Nicodemus is a symbol of the Pharisaic hierarchy and we see Jesus contrasting fixed thinking, characterised by literalism, with an openness to a new kind of consciousness. Nicodemus' starting point is a realisation that the words and deeds of Jesus must be God-endorsed. Nicodemus believes they are too authentic to have a human origin, and so he has come to seek enlightenment.

Today's extract occurs towards the end of the conversation where Jesus talks about God's designs being carried out by 'the only Son'. Previous to this, Jesus had said to Nicodemus that the Spirit moves where it wills and only those who are open to a new kind of consciousness can be uplifted and changed by the Spirit.

Our translations routinely refer to 'belief' in Jesus, but overtones of the Greek verb 'believe' *pisteuō*, point to trust and reliance. John is not talking about theology or dogma or rules. He is pointing to a kind of trust in Christ that colours a person's thinking and action. It is the Spirit that can bring a person to the kind of conviction that leads to total reliance on the Son. Tradition and learning cannot bring this about; only openness to the Spirit.

A commitment to often reading small amounts of Scripture can open us to insights that come from the Spirit.

Refusal to be open to the Spirit brings self-condemnation. If we reject the movement of the Spirit, Jesus is saying, we are closing ourselves off from what he has to offer. Humans are not obliged to accept the way of Jesus Christ; they can shape their own destiny – downhill.

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My happiness grows in direct proportion to my acceptance and in inverse proportion to my expectations.  
Acceptance is the key to everything. Michael J. Fox

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The Sunday school teacher was reading a Bible story to her class.

'The man named Lot was told to take his wife and flee out of the city and not look back. But his wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt.'

A little boy softly asked, 'What happened to the flea?'

*Laurie Woods*