

PENTECOST: A TIME TO BE FILLED WITH GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

The First Sunday after Pentecost

Trinity Sunday

June 19, 2011

Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a

Psalm 8

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Matthew 28:16-20

The Mystery of the Trinity

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is an ancient Christian formula denoting the doctrine of the Trinity which, historically, is both complex and controversial. It appears twice in today's lectionary lessons. In 2 Corinthians 13:13, it shows up as "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (*GNT*). In the closing lines of Matthew's Gospel, it appears as part of the Great Commission: "...baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit..." (Matthew 28.19b, *GNT*).

In the passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, grace, love, and fellowship seem to be associated with three separate sources, Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit; while in the Matthean passage, Jesus is quoted as saying, "In the *name* of" not "in the *names* of."

During the first centuries of Christianity, the subject of God's nature and the relationship of the Father to the Son, and of both to the Holy Spirit, occupied the best theological minds of the era. After grappling theologically with this mystery, the doctrine of the Trinity was ultimately introduced at the First Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. In those early years, theologians were trying to figure out how these three natures of God could be expressed in a monotheistic context. These were not three gods, but rather they were all part of the same God, eternal and united.

How does the Trinity work, then? Human explanations always seem to fall short. St. Patrick is credited with using the three leaves on one stem of the shamrock to explain it. But even that is not sufficient. The leaves, although attached to the same stem, are still three *separate* leaves. The way in which the Trinity functions remains a mystery.

Yet, however it works, the Trinity represents a promise kept. In looking over today's readings, it is hard not to notice what might appear to be bookends. The readings include the opening lines of the first creation narrative in Genesis, as well as the closing lines of the Gospel according to Matthew (the book which begins with the genealogy of Jesus, and provides verification of his messiahship). We have, in essence, the alpha and the

omega. For, enclosed between these bookends is the promise of God's love, care, comfort, and the promise of salvation for fallen humanity, as well as a divine fulfillment of that promise.

This week's Reflection was prepared by James Harvey, MA, a graduate of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL, who serves on staff at ABS in the Outreach Department, and has been a Lay Leader at the Park Slope United Methodist Church in Brooklyn, NY.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Micronesia – with thanks to God for Bible work in this region; and with prayers that the economic climate of the country will improve and that churches will be able to meet the Scripture needs of their congregations; and with prayers that projects will attract funding to help the Society supply Bibles at subsidized prices so they are affordable to everyone; **Indonesia** – with thanks to God for the Bible Center now being built; and with prayers that Christians and churches will support the work and enable its completion on schedule; also pray that God will bless the ongoing work on numerous Bible translations and revisions, and that the *Literacy and New Reader* program in Nias, South Sumatra, will run smoothly and bring blessings to many people; **Philippines** – with thanks to God for the success of the Bible Museum; and with prayers for funding to further develop the exhibits and attract more visitors; also pray for the *May They Be One* Bible campaign, for the goal to distribute 400,000 Bibles this year to poor Filipino families, and for God to bless the efforts to help people have more passion for God's Word and engage with it in their daily lives.

Activity Corner: “Messages of Blessing”

Supplies needed: Bible; 8-1/2 x 11 construction paper (assorted colors); old magazines; scissors; glue or paste; markers or pens.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:13 and encourage each one to share how they have experienced God's grace and love and unity in the Spirit. Invite members of your household to prepare cards for the residents of a local nursing home or rehabilitation center. Fold a sheet of construction paper in half; on the front affix a picture chosen from a magazine that would tie in with a message of hope and encouragement. On the inside of the card, compose a short message, concluding with 2 Corinthians 13:13. Throughout the week, during devotional time, pray for those who receive the “messages of blessing.”