

Trinity Sunday

A gathering word:

In mystery and grandeur we see the face of God
in earthiness and the ordinary we know the love of Christ
In heights and depths and life and death: the spirit of God is moving among us

Let's pray

God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity, I ask for your presence to enter this space. I know that in self-giving love, Your very nature teaches me how to love another.

Father and Creator,
Son and Redeemer,
Spirit and Advocate,

I call upon you to teach me in this time. Teach me to pray. Teach me to love. Teach me to be one, as you are one. With all of the divisions we create with our own biases, from social class to race, from gender to age, from ability to different abilities, I know I still have much to learn.

Abba, Father, Creator – I call You by many names, but the names I choose show my relationship with You. I desire to draw closer to You, O God. I desire to hear Your voice above the chatter of the world, to know Your ways and to walk in them.

Spirit of Life, Wind and Breath among us, I feel You move through me, guiding me on my journey, inspiring me to share Your love with others.

Jesus, the Christ, the Saviour of us all, our Brother and Friend, I desire to walk in Your ways and to love others as You have first loved me.

Triune God, I desire to relate to You and to others more fully, so that I might draw into the depths of Your love, first glimpsed at creation, when Your voice called me and the earth forth out of darkness into Your light. Continue to call me, guide me and lead me into this world and beyond in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught me and all to pray, saying:

Our Father... Amen

Reading John 16:13-15 (New International Version)

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

The Face of God

A question that has been asked of me by several people over the last year or so has been the relevance of on the pew leaflet of the particular title for the Sunday of the year – known actually as the liturgical cycle. Some people have wondered, what does this really mean for me in my daily Christian life and do we really need to know?

Let me say firstly, that the liturgical calendar or cycle is not the sole domain of Catholicism as is often thought. In fact, what do we understand by the term Catholic, which comes from the Greek *katholikos*, the combination of two words, *kata* meaning concerning, and *holos* meaning whole. According therefore to the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, the word catholic mean “regarding the whole,” or, more simply, “universal” or “general.”

With this in mind, what the liturgical calendar gives us is the ever-present cycle of the Church’s universal life offered in days of the week with corresponding Scripture readings, referred to as the lectionary. The question we need to ask is: do we actually notice this ever-present cycle? How often do we look past objects, such as street lights or telephone poles, precisely because they are pervasive? It is easy to treat the liturgical calendar merely as part of Catholicism’s décor, the ornamental mantle clock with Roman numerals that looks nice but which we really do not use to tell time.

Many holy men and women through the ages, however, have set their internal clock to the liturgical calendar and have found their lives reshaped in the process - for the purpose of the liturgical calendar is to orient our days around the person of Jesus. This process begins with Sunday worship, which is the cornerstone of the whole liturgical calendar, recognising that Jesus was resurrected on Easter Sunday and began the renewal of the whole world. But, while the Resurrection is the central Christian event, every moment of the life of Jesus is a revelation of the nature and character of God. For this reason, we need not merely worship on Sunday, but everyday throughout Christian year, because our lives should be structured around the life of Jesus. The Church’s, which is you and I, desires to see Jesus in all things, and all things in light of Jesus also influence the scriptural readings chosen for use throughout the liturgical year. Since Jesus is God’s ultimate self-revelation to humanity, the entire human attempt to know God - the complete story of salvation history - culminates in Him. So inspired by this insight, the early Church Fathers developed the liturgical calendar so as to shape us at a level deeper than consciousness itself, so that we will find ourselves automatically applying Christ’s story to our own.

So having said all this, what is the reason? Well, today our reflection time focuses on what the calendar calls ‘*Trinity Sunday*’. This is one of those events in the liturgical year we encounter, but what is so important about this Sunday. As Presbyterian, our reformation thinking has removed our worship from the liturgical calendar so what. Yes, we do associate with some of the events in the year, primarily Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost. To a lesser degree we may recognize Epiphany and Ascension but there after very little else. As part of the reformation churches, we do not mark the Saints and Martyrs and other feast days in the year which some of our other Christian denominational friends do. I don’t think that make our faith any poorer. However I think that those who do mark the liturgical year are trying to be faithful to the life of Christ and those who have lived lives in the shadow and way and teaching of Jesus, and that I believe is important.

Today is one of those lesser recognized days in the calendar, and in some circles of church life may also be called the *Feast of the Holy Trinity*, honouring the Holy Trinity - the Father, Son and Holy

Spirit. This celebration in Western liturgical churches is the Sunday following Pentecost, which we marked last Sunday – 50 days after Easter. It is known that the feast was celebrated on this day from as early as the 10th century. You may be interested to know too, that in Eastern Orthodoxy, the first day of the three-day Pentecost feast is known as Trinity Sunday.

However, the word “Trinity” does not appear in Scripture, but it is taught in Matthew 28:18-20 and 2 Corinthians 13:14. The concept of the Trinity can never be completely understood or rationalize, and understanding of all scriptural doctrine is by faith which comes through the work of the Holy Spirit; therefore, it is appropriate that this mystery is celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost, when the outpouring of the Holy Spirit first occurred and so allows the Church and believers, you and I, to further reflect on the mystery of God after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. This helps us see the connection that if we truly want to understand the Trinity, we need to have the gift of the Holy Spirit. We can never fully understand who God is on our own and desperately need his guidance and inspiration.

Two years ago, on Trinity Sunday, I was invited to preach for the then Nominating Committee of the congregation of Largo Parish and this I did in St Andrews. I was challenged then to consider how I might expound the idea of the triune nature of God.

When anyone talks about God, sometime it can be quite confusing because we may speak of God as, our Father in heaven, or God as Jesus Christ, or even God as the Holy Spirit. So how many is God one may ask – because we, as Christians believe in one God. The doctrine of the Trinity is very complex, yet I believe we can understand it in a more simplified manner and the members of the Committee who heard me will probably recall the analogy I used and I share this with us this Trinity Sunday.

As Christians and the church, we remember our God is one God, but a God of three natures. So how can we understand God as three – Father, Son and Holy Spirit and yet also as One. Well, I had with me that Sunday two years ago a few objects, but I will use the graphics to illustrate the idea of one God as three persons.



The first object I showed, was a rather chubby pair of lips, which we know, make up the outside of our mouth. What do we do with our mouth, besides eating or drinking? We can speak or talk.

I suggested that a mouth is like God, the Father. The Bible tells us that at the beginning of time, God the Father spoke and the world and all life and plants came into being. God also spoke a lot to the people of the Old Testament times and he told them how to live and love him. To obey his laws and commands and to live as his people. God spoke an awful lot through those days to make himself known as their loving God and Father.

Sadly his people did not always do as God told them and so God decided he needed to do something about this – God, the Son – Jesus was born into the world – so that God’s people could not just hear God the Father speak, but also now see and know God with their own eyes.

So I suggested that God the Son, Jesus, is like this pair of eyes. Jesus could not only now see the people but that He could also be seen by them. When Jesus was getting ready to go back to heaven, he said to his disciple now you know me, you have seen me, you also now know God the Father.



They were confused, so Jesus said to them, I am in the Father and the Father is in me. I and the Father are one. He then told his disciples not to worry or be afraid, because he would not leave them alone. He was going to send to them God the Holy Spirit, to be their helper and friend – who would be with them.

So I suggested the nose is God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to live in us like breath or air. How do we get air into us? We breathe air in through our nose. God, the Holy Spirit breathes into our lives and lives in us, and when we believe in Jesus, God the Holy Spirit lives in us and we are made God's children.



So if God is Father – a mouth; and God is Son – eyes and God is Holy Spirit – a nose – what do all these parts make up?



Yes, a face. So I suggested that God is a face, the whole face – like this face mask. This face mask or our face is made up of a mouth, eyes and a nose, but we have one face and each of the parts of the face do different things, but it is all still one face.

So too is God. He is one God, but he is also made up of different parts - God as Father, is the creator and maker of life and all the world. God the Son, is Jesus who came into the world to show us God and God's love for us and He died for us, to save us from sin and give us life forever. And God, the Holy Spirit, comes like the breath of God to live in us our hearts when we believe in Jesus and helps us to know God in our lives every day.

One God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – God the Trinity which means - three in one, one in three.

Today would also have been the Sunday we would have gathered to celebrate the love of God and his work of redeeming grace and salvation wrought for us in the death of Jesus, for we would have shared in Holy Communion seeking the Holy Spirit blessing on the elements of bread and wine that as we ate and drank of them, we would remember Jesus death and resurrection was for the atonement of our sin and that by grace, when we seek Jesus in our lives we are made new creatures in the eyes of God.

We don't very often join in the words of faith at our Communion services as we do at a baptismal service, where we declare our faith in the Apostle's Creed, but today in place of Communion, you may want to take a few moments to read the words of the Nicene Creed by the First Council of Nicaea and amended in 381, at the First Council of Constantinople. A creed that confirms the doctrine of the Trinity.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with

the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Let's pray

Almighty and everlasting God, beyond all space and time, I give you thanks for who you are and all that you have done for me.

Loving Father of all, I praise you for your kindness and mercy by which you sustain me and provide for my every need; caring for me that I am never in want.

Jesus Christ, my Saviour, I worship you for coming into my neighbourhood to be my friend, even my brother, for showing me the magnitude of the love of God, revealing His saving power, His forgiveness and offering me a new beginning after leaving my sins behind, giving yourself for my redemption on the cross.

Holy Spirit, free and mysterious as the wind, powerful as the fire, I adore you for blowing new life into my heart, for purifying me from my sins and faults, for teaching and reminding me the words of Christ, and leading me in His light.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with awe and wonder, joy and gladness I offer you thanks, and pray for your creation, its nations, and peoples, for your church, and all in need.

I pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ in its many manifestations around the world; for a spirit of unity in faith and purpose amongst the different denominations. I pray that Christian witness may be credible in a world awash with ideologies, where cultures clash and religion seems only to exacerbate conflict. Spirit of God, open the eyes of those who are blind to any view other than their own; soften the hearts of those who claim a God-given right to maim and to kill; enlighten the minds of those whose sense of what is God-pleasing leaves little if any room for basic humanity in their dealings with those who do not share their views.

I pray for all who bear responsibility of government around the world; for those who make our laws and those who interpret and apply them; I pray for a greater harnessing of the gifts of all who can contribute to the common good and a more equal sharing of that good amongst the people. Lord God, may the world's leaders seek not personal power but the public good; may conflicts be faced honestly and needs recognised and met; may all our communities be built up on what is good, true, just and right. I pray for peace and co-operation, harmony and mutual respect in all our dealings with one another locally, nationally and internationally.

Father God, may there be love and respect for one another in every household; may there be mutual support and thoughtfulness, consideration and trust. May the hearts' cries for help be

heard; the tears collected and the fears quieted; may suffering be eased and guilt erased through your healing love.

I pray for those who depend on me, and those on whom I depend, for our physical and spiritual needs. Enable us to honour one another as children of your making. I remember those who told me of you through their words and lives. I pray for all known to me in special need of comfort, healing, love of neighbour, support of friends; and I think of those who have died in faith. And so in these few moments of quietness I articulate my own particular prayers in the silence of my heart...

Hear my pray, O Lord my God, in Jesus name. Amen.

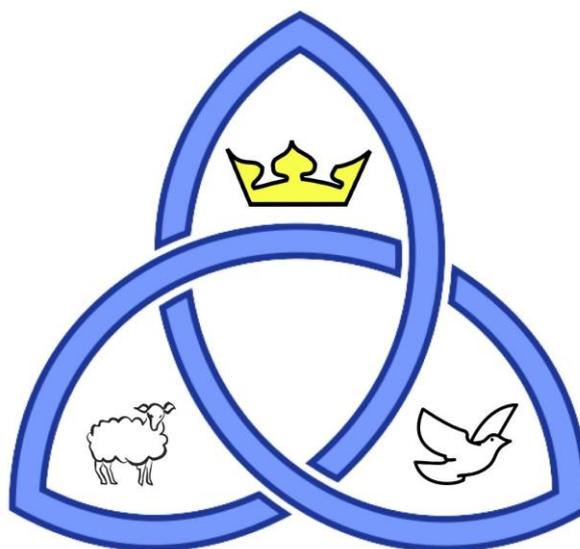
A Trinitarian hymn for this Sunday, from Church Hymnary 4, number 110 written by Horatius Bonar (1808-1889) to the tune Regent Square.

Glory be to God the Father,
Glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit,
Great Jehovah three in One.
Singing glory, glory.
Glory while eternal ages run.

Glory be to Him who loved us,
Washed us from each spot and stain.
Glory be to Him who bought us,
Made us kings with Him to reign.
Singing glory, glory.
Glory to the Lamb who once was slain.

Glory to the King of Angels,
Glory to the Church's King.
Glory to the King of nations,
Heaven and earth your praises bring.
Singing glory, glory.
Glory to the King of Nations bring.

Glory blessing praise eternal,
Thus the choir of angels sings.
Honour riches power dominion,
Thus its praise creation brings.
Singing glory, glory.
Glory, glory to the King of Kings



Benediction

May the love of the Father enfold you, the wisdom of the Son enlighten you, the fire of the Spirit inflame you; and may the blessing of God rest upon you and abide with you, now and evermore. Amen.