

Trinity Sunday, Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to Nicodemus:

‘God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost
but may have eternal life.

For God sent his Son into the world
not to condemn the world,
but so that through him the world might be saved.
No one who believes in him will be condemned;
but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already,
because he has refused to believe in the name of God’s
only Son.’

(John 3:16–18)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- From earliest times, the Church has pondered the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity—most eloquently defined at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) as three persons in one God—is the result of this.
- Theologians today continue to contemplate the mystery of the Trinity.
- The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that ‘The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life. God alone can make it known to us by revealing himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’ (§261).
- St Patrick is reputed to have attempted to explain the mystery of the Trinity as God who is Three-in-one by using the shamrock as a symbol. Another commonly used symbol of the Trinity is the triangle.
- The Trinity is sometimes described as the Lover (Father), the Beloved (Son) and the Love between them (Spirit).
- Our God is relational. Humans, created in the image and likeness of God, are created to be in relationship with others.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Nicodemus, a member of the ruling elite of the Jewish people, wants to believe in Jesus but is afraid to do so publicly, so he comes to Jesus at night (John 3:2). Darkness and night are often used in John as symbols of an inability to accept the truth of who Jesus is, but still Nicodemus is drawn. He is open to the truth but fears the consequences. One of those consequences is that belief in Jesus as Son of the Father leads to life, while rejecting that truth leads to condemnation.

In John, ‘the world’ is used as a symbol of unbelief or darkness, but Jesus tells Nicodemus that the world is not to be condemned because the light has come into the world. It is now up to individuals to recognise that light and come to belief. Only thus can the world be saved. Jesus is also showing the relationship he has with the Father—that of the only Son.

- Do you empathise with Nicodemus at all? Is there a niggling fear or uncertainty about coming to believe in Jesus and learning more about him?
- Reflect on times when you have found light in the darkness.
- In what ways does Jesus give you a glimpse of God?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Paul writes a beautiful blessing to the community in Corinth: ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.’ (See today’s second reading.) How do you experience this grace, love and fellowship of the Trinity in the community you have joined or seek to join? Are there things that make ‘belief’ hard for you?
- What led you to wanting to make this journey to belief?
- How do you understand ‘eternal life’?
- This week, contemplate your own relationships with people. In what ways do our own relationships with others teach us something of the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit?
- Recite this trinitarian prayer often this week:

*Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now
and ever shall be,
Amen.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

Perhaps the greatest prayer of the Trinity is the sign of the cross, with which we identify ourselves as believers in the Father, Son and Spirit. The acclamation of faith in the Trinity is joined by a gesture tracing the cross of Christ, by which salvation came to the world. The gesture embraces the head (the intellectual aspects of ourselves); the core or centre of our bodies, the gut (the intuitive, spontaneous aspects of ourselves); the shoulders (representing our capacity for work in service of others) and the heart (the emotional aspects of ourselves).

The great credal statement, or statement of belief, we make each week as part of the liturgy reinforces our belief in the Trinity:

We believe in one God, the Father the Almighty ...

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ ...

We believe in the Holy Spirit ...

This Creed is known as the Nicene Creed after the Council of Nicaea, which was called in the year 325 by the Emperor Constantine. There had been earlier councils of the Church, but Constantine called this first general, or ecumenical, council to ensure that all Christians professed common belief and to refute certain heresies that had grown up about the nature of the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit.

- You could spend time looking at the Creed and explaining the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit: 'God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not made; of one being ...'
- Explore how we might develop a pattern of prayer to the God who is Three-in-one.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

John declares that his purpose in writing his gospel is 'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name' (John 20:31). John speaks of life on two levels: not just living in the world, but having eternal life with God. This text also makes clear the relationship between the Father and Son. In knowing the Son, one comes to know the Father.

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- Are there artistic representations of the Trinity in your church or community centre? If you are unable to gather in your church buildings, an internet search will yield many trinitarian images. Use these as a way of exploring the idea of a God who is Three-in-one. Perhaps you could provide an image of the Trinity for catechumens to

take home.

- Three lighted candles and the open Scriptures could form the focus for prayer. You could begin with the sign of the cross said slowly to emphasise its real meaning. Have sponsors and catechumens bless each other by tracing a sign of the cross in the air while reciting the benediction from Corinthians. A suitable song could be 'Father in heaven' (GA 381). Conclude with the prayer of exorcism in the RCIA at §94A.

NOTES