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When the bishops of Latin America met in 2007 in Aparecida, Brazil, they proclaimed that “The church is called to a deep and profound rethinking of its mission ... confirming, renewing, and revitalizing the newness of the Gospel rooted in our history.” That statement comes from the bishops’ document called “Disciples and Missionaries,” a title which suggests that you can’t be one without the other. The document’s final version was written by a committee of bishops under the leadership of Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio now known as Pope Francis.

Although today’s feast, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, sounds as if it might call us into the heady heights of dogmatic discourse, the readings invite us into a decidedly practical, down-to-earth reflection, not only on God, but on who we are as disciples.

Moses is the first person to address us in today’s Liturgy of the Word. We get to eavesdrop on a homily he preached to inspire his people to strengthen their commitment. If we listen as heirs of his tradition, we hear him call us to remember our own experiences of God. He took his people through their memories of the Exodus and hearing God’s voice. That suggests that we, too, might recall how and when we have been aware of God’s presence, of God’s love, of God’s grandeur. He’s recommending that we allow this Sabbath to claim some of our time so that we can remember and appreciate the ways we have come to know God in our individual and communal lives. When we do that, we will be well prepared to sing, “Blessed the people the Lord has chosen!”

Paul’s Letter to the Romans advances Moses’ message by pointing out how God’s own Spirit is active in us. Francis Thompson’s poem, “The Hound of Heaven,” offers a meditative image of what Paul is suggesting. Thompson portrays God as the heavenly hound who never ceases trying to lure us toward our divine destiny. Paul tells us we know God’s Spirit as the one who leads us to seek Abba, the God we know as a loving parent.

Today’s Gospel, the last lines of the Gospel of Matthew, portrays the post-resurrection group of disciples as a broken community who waver between worship and doubt, a description that also describes many in our own day. The disciples had followed the instructions of their companions, the women who had been told by both the angel at the tomb and by Jesus where the Lord wanted to meet them. When they met the risen Christ, he explained what his resurrection meant by saying that all power in heaven and earth was his. He was victorious and if they believed in him and in his promise to remain with them, they would also believe that no evil can overcome him — or them.

Little wonder that disciples both worship and doubt! Believing in Christ implies that they must also believe in themselves as his disciples. The risen Lord believes in his disciples enough to hand on his mission, telling them to make their faith contagious, to spread the good news not as dogma, but in the form of vibrant and attractive love and hope — the only powers capable of transforming ordinary people into other Christs.

The wavering disciples who gathered on that mountain did go out to preach and that made it possible for their faith to overpower their doubts. They had to invent how to carry forth Jesus' message when he was no longer with them as a living prophet, a faithful son of Israel. It was only through that process that they could discover how he was with them in other, more universal ways.

The first disciples had to do in their day what the bishops at Aparecida are calling the church to do in our day. Like them, we need rethink our mission. As heirs to Moses, we are called to renew and confirm the faith we have received. Knowing that the Spirit is ever with us, we need to take the time necessary to hear the Spirit's urgings, to allow ourselves to be lured toward the God who made us and calls us into an unknown but marvelous future.

As people chosen and loved by God, we are called to fulfill our vocation as disciples and missionaries, followers of Christ who spread his message and love. Like the early disciples, we must be willing to rethink our mission and revitalize our Gospel message. Moses tells us that we begin by gratefully remembering God's works of creation and liberation. Paul assures us that the Spirit will urge us toward our goal. Most of all, the risen Lord promises to remain with us. Although we may not explain it as such, the process of being disciples and missionaries is what allows our triune God to live in us and work through us.

## **DEUTERONOMY 4:32-34, 39-40**

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the title of the Book of Deuteronomy means "words," a name that comes from its opening verse and reflects the fact that much of it reads like a sermon. Our title, "Deuteronomy," reflects the idea that it is a copy of the law or a second rendition of it. Deuteronomy is the last book of the Pentateuch and as such it looks back to the past as well as to the future.

What stands out in the selection we hear today is Moses' insistence that whether or not they deserve it, whether or not they have understood or been faithful, Israel's experience of God is unique among all the people on Earth. Moses invites his listeners to take the long view, to look at the entire expanse of time and space and ask themselves if any other people or nation has had an experience comparable to what they have in their relationship with God.

First, Moses reminds them that they have heard the very voice of God speak from the fire at Horeb (Exodus 20:18-21). Then, stressing God's utter integrity, the power-filled truth of God's word, Moses reminds them that God ventured out to free them and form them as a nation. Just as in the creation, God's words became actions on behalf of the people.

These ideas lead us into the heart of Israel's identity. As a people, the Israelites understood themselves through their relationship to God. First, their God, unlike the mute idols of other nations, actually spoke to them. Even if the experience frightened them nearly to death, they knew that God had chosen them as dialogue partners and that their God's demands were always for their own good. Secondly, unlike the gods who demanded groveling and senseless sacrifice, the God of Israel asked only for obedience and acted on their behalf through Moses and others. The Lord freed them from their pagan overlords, leading them to recognize themselves as God's own, beloved people. Moses reminds them that the God who has reached out to them so tenderly and powerfully is the only God in heaven and earth. Therefore, doing what God commands will always turn out to their benefit.

This reading also demonstrates how Israel understood herself as a people unbounded by time. They could say "we" when referring to ancient times and their ancestors; they identified with those who were led out of Egypt. This selection also shows that Israel understood God through experience rather than theory. They knew who God was through the ways God had acted on their behalf rather than through philosophy.

Moses' homily invites us to take our own long, loving and grateful look at history to remember who God is and has been for us. Whereas the Exodus was the key event for Israel, Christ stands as the central revelation in our history. As Christians, the roots of our history go back to Moses and the time of creation and include all that had to do with Christ's life, death and resurrection as well as the saints and sinners who have called themselves his disciples.

We are a people formed by all the ways God's grace has brought us to today, journeying forward to the future God has intended from the beginning.

## **PSALMS 33:4-5, 6, 9, 18-19, 20, 22**

Our meditation on Moses' message and its implications could hardly be better summarized than with the psalm refrain: "Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own."

The verses from Psalm 33 echo much of Moses' message in Deuteronomy. "Upright is the word of the Lord," proclaims God's faithful integrity. The phrase reminds us that God's word creates reality and no divine promise goes unfulfilled. Even if we are brought to the test, God will never trick us; every action of God will reveal kindness and justice.

In the third verse, we recall God's most marvelous and revelatory characteristic: God's tender love for creatures. We proclaim that God watches over us and responds with the kindness we need and long for.

The final verses express our response to God's great love. "Our soul waits for the Lord," is a way of saying that knowing God is our deepest longing and greatest hope. We proclaim our belief in God's love and protection and ask that it never cease.

Like the first reading, this psalm summons us to recall our own individual and communal experience of God's love. It prods us to take time to appreciate the glory of creation and to marvel as Psalm 139 does in saying, "I praise you for I am wonderfully made, wonderful are your works!" All in all, singing this psalm helps us proclaim with all our heart how blessed we are to be chosen by God.

## **ROMANS 8:14-17**

One obvious reason why the church chose this selection from Romans for today's feast is its specific mention of the three persons of the Trinity. But Paul has no interest in explaining dogma; he wants us to contemplate how God relates to us through each of the divine persons.

Paul begins by speaking of our being "led by the Spirit of God." Scripture scholar Douglas Moo explains that this phrase speaks of more than being guided. Being led by the Spirit means "to have the direction of one's life as a whole determined by the Spirit" (The Epistle to the Romans). The difference is that rather than looking outward for orientation, those who are "led" allow the Spirit to so permeate their hearts that they are inwardly and intuitively moved by the Spirit's presence within them.

Paul again emphasizes the idea of being led by the Spirit as he speaks of our relationship to the Father. He tells us that those led by the Spirit approach God instinctively like children approach a loving parent from whom they expect all good. Finally, Paul tells us that people moved by the Spirit identify themselves as joint heirs with Christ to everything God promises.

This passage is but one expression of Paul's everyday mysticism. Although Paul places little value on extraordinary experiences of the Spirit, he finds countless ways to encourage Christians to recognize the immeasurable effects of God's life in them through their relationship with Christ. Paul's belief that we and all creation are moving toward a glorious future permeates his letters and especially the Letter to the Romans. Beginning with Genesis, Paul's religious tradition taught that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. Paul sees Christ surpassing that as he shows that humanity is created for genuine union with God.

## **MATTHEW 28:16-20**

At the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, we were reminded of the prophecy that a virgin would conceive a son: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and name him Emmanuel which means God is with us" (Matthew 1:23). In the last line of the Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." Matthew is telling us that what began with the birth of Jesus has no end. That is an especially important promise in light of the fact that Matthew paints a final picture of the disciples as a weak and fallible group.

Matthew opens this final scene of the Gospel telling us that the eleven disciples went to a mountain in Galilee because the women had told them that Jesus promised to meet them there. Although we may not realize it, their encounter on the mountain is the first and only time that Matthew depicts the risen Lord appearing to men. Christ had appeared to the women who went to his tomb, but no men entered into that part of Matthew's story. In Matthew's Gospel there is no upper room, no Emmaus story, not even a mention of an appearance to Peter or others. The only people who saw the risen Lord were the women and then the eleven who believed enough in the good news the women proclaimed to undertake a journey to Galilee.

Matthew gives us much detail about the women's encounter with Christ. When he says that Jesus met them as they left the tomb and greeted them, he implies that Jesus was waiting for them. Matthew tells us that the women drew near Jesus, took hold of his feet and did him homage just as the Magi had done when he was an infant. Although they may not have understood all that was happening, the women approached him with unqualified faith. With that, Christ commissioned them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee where they would meet him.

Matthew tells us that the eleven went to Galilee, a journey of more than 60 miles from Jerusalem. One can only imagine what they discussed as they walked along, but they had plenty of time to do it. With little ado, Matthew indicates that they arrived at a mountain and saw Jesus there.

At the moment of encounter, Matthew tells us that when they saw him, the men worshipped and doubted. This clearly implies that their faith was less complete than that of the women. As we imagine this scene, we should remember that the group was called "the eleven," a reminder that one of the chosen ones had betrayed them all. Matthew describes the group with all their failings and still indicates that the all-powerful Lord knew exactly what he was doing as he handed on his mission to this frail troupe and those they would bring into their fold.

If we would be tempted to put too much emphasis on the importance of those particular eleven, Matthew quickly forces us to see a much larger picture as he relates Jesus' command: They are to bring what they have to the entire world.

In a turn of phrase that can't be well translated into English, Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, "Go, ... disciple all the nations." Making a verb from the word for disciples, Jesus implies that his followers must do more than teach. "Discipling" implies communicating a message that can transform the self-concept and the very being of those who hear them. To "disciple" others is to lead them into what Paul talked about as being led by the Spirit. Matthew underlines this by showing that discipling goes hand in hand with baptizing, the practice the early church understood as the way to communicate God's Spirit to others (Acts 10:47).

Matthew's Gospel ends with hints of its beginning. The first to worship Emmanuel were foreigners. In the end, the disciples are to invite the entire world to share the life of Father, Son and Spirit.

## **Planning: Holy Trinity**

**By: Lawrence Mick**

We often think of mystagogy as simply the last stage of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and assume that it only happens during the Fifty Days of Easter. That is a prime time for mystagogy, of course, but mystagogy is really a fundamental approach to catechesis (and preaching) that is helpful in many situations.

Mystagogy is simply formation based on experience of the liturgy. It draws out some of the meaning of the symbols and rituals we use and also reflects on the implications of these experiences. Its goal, though, is more than instruction; it is intended to help people enter more fully into the liturgy and thus more fully into the life of God.

Trinity Sunday celebrates the most basic mystery of life. Recent theological treatments of the Trinity have helped us to realize the whole universe can be understood as the expression of the Trinity in time and space. These authors also help us realize that we are invited to share deeply in the life of the Trinity itself. (One book I would recommend is *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* by Richard Rohr with Mike Morrell. It is written in accessible language and

discusses both of the above insights.)

The challenge still remains: How do we help the assembly to benefit from this recent theological progress? One approach is to offer mystagogy on the sign of the cross. Why do we do it? What does it mean to mark ourselves with this sign? What does it mean to pray or to live “in the name of” the three persons of the Trinity?

Another approach would offer mystagogy on the ending we use with each opening collect at Mass: “through our Lord Jesus Christ...” This prayer ending reminds us that the liturgy is offered to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Both approaches may help parishioners recognize that their lives are caught up into the Trinity.

Hymns highlighting the Trinity seem obvious choices, but be sure you don’t stop singing after two verses if the hymn focuses on one person of the Trinity in each verse! Those who compose intercessions should resist the temptation to address petitions serially to the Father, Son and Spirit. That whole prayer is addressed to the Father, as are most of the prayers throughout the liturgy. And the words of the petitions are addressed to the assembly, inviting them to pray for various intentions (“Let us pray to the Lord”); their response is the actual prayer.

Monday is Memorial Day in the U.S. It is good to remember those who have died, but the liturgy is not a place to praise our country as though it was divinely created as the best in the world. Pray for our country, not to it.

## Prayers: Holy Trinity

By: Joan DeMerchant

### Introduction

Today we celebrate the relationships at the heart of our faith. As God eternally participates in the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit, we too participate in this sacred community and in the great historic sweep of God’s people past, present, future. Through baptism, we are called by God to become part of this deeply connected family. Let us commit to loving and serving not only members of this family, but all people.

### Penitential Act

- Lord Jesus, you revealed that God is a community of persons: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you gave the apostles power to baptize in the name of the Trinity: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you invite us into this sacred community in baptism: Lord, have mercy.

### Prayer of the Faithful

**Presider** Brothers and sisters, as members of God’s family, we pray for a world in need of community.

**Minister** For all baptized Christians: that we may embody God’s invitation for all people into one sacred community ... we pray,

- For all those whose relationships have been shattered by misunderstanding, conflict, violence, injustice or war; and for the healing of these relationships ... we pray,
- For those who reject others or create exclusive communities based on race, creed, economic status, gender or any kind of bias; and for the courage to examine our own biases ... we pray,
- On this Memorial Day weekend celebrated in the United States, we pray for all who have died in the service of others in any war and for a world committed to peace ... we pray,
- For this community, especially the sick, the dying and those in need; and for the commitment to ensure that all our members enjoy a sense of belonging in this baptismal family ... we pray,

**Presider** God who is divinely One, yet more than One, we come to you yearning to live in deep, loving relationship with one another. Show us how to be faithful to each other and to extend your love to all people. We ask this in the name of Jesus your Son, who reigns with you and the Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

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