

June 4, 2023
The Holy Trinity
John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Background:

John's Gospel was written later than the other Gospels, and his community would have been familiar with those Gospels. Therefore, he did not need to include introductory information about the person of Jesus. Instead, his Gospel begins with John the Baptist testifying to the greatness of Jesus and then moves directly to Jesus' call of the first disciples. The second chapter of John's Gospel describes the wedding feast at Cana and Jesus expelling the merchants from the Temple. Both events would have disturbed the peoples' understanding of their relationship to God.

The third chapter of John's Gospel begins with Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee of the day, coming to Jesus at night to gain a clearer understanding of Jesus and his teaching. Nicodemus asks Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him. "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." (John 3:2-3) Jesus' response to Nicodemus uses a word that means both again and above, so that when Jesus tells him that one must be born "again" in order to enter the Kingdom of God, Nicodemus is not sure what he means. It is from within this conversation with Nicodemus that the Gospel text is taken.

The text states that God gave his only Son to the world so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life. In John's Gospel, "the world" is sometimes cast in a positive light, but more often it is cast in a negative light. The early Christians' experience of the world changed drastically in those years when the texts that make up the New Testament were being written. In the early years, the Christian movement was largely a segment of the Jewish community. Their daily life was shaped by their Jewish community and religious sensibilities. They were a group within their community that was convinced that Jesus was the long-awaited messiah. They lived by that conviction, and argued with their contemporaries, but maintained their status in the Jewish community. As Gentiles were converted and welcomed into the Christian community, tensions arose within the community between Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians. Some Jewish Christians rejected their new faith, resentments arose, and eventually the Christian community was expelled from the synagogues and a more hostile attitude toward the world emerged. This shift in attitude is also reflected in John's Gospel and elsewhere within the New Testament.

The first verse of today's Gospel is among the most familiar texts in the Christian Scriptures. Reginald Fuller, a well-respected scripture scholar, says that this one statement is "a succinct summary of the whole Gospel..." The text states succinctly that God is motivated by love to give us his Son so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life. God's giving here includes both God giving his Son in the incarnation and the giving of his Son in the crucifixion. God's intention and desire is clear, that we might have eternal life. The text also addresses those who do not accept the Son. They bring judgement upon themselves; it is not God who judges them or rejects them. They choose to either accept God's desire to share eternal life with them or reject God's desire for them.

Reflection Questions:

1. Take a few minutes to think about how you and people around you have used the word "world." What was meant by that word?

2. Place yourself in the presence of when God decides to send his Son into the world. How would you describe that scene? How does God's desire come through to you? What is your reaction?
3. Have there been periods in your life when it has been difficult to believe in the goodness of the world, creation, and the people around you? What happens to you when you choose to live out of that attitude?
4. How is your life different when you live out of a basic reverence, trust, and sense of love that is in harmony with God's desire?
5. God so loved that world that... (How many times could you fill in this sentence?)
6. The text seems to invite us to contemplate and enter the heart of God. What is your prayer like when you come before God conscious of the heart of God?
7. Can you take some time to talk openly and honestly with God about how you feel about the world right now, how you would like to feel about the world, and what grace you need from God to approach the world as God approaches the world?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for June 4, 2023, The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Moses went up Mount Sinai as the Lord had commanded, taking along the two stone tablets. Having come down in a cloud, the Lord stood with Moses there and proclaimed his name, " Lord." Thus the Lord passed before him and cried out, "The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity." Moses at once bowed down to the ground in worship. Then he said, "If I find favor with you, O Lord, do come along in our company. This is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins, and receive us as your own."

Glory and praise for ever!

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers,
praiseworthy and exalted above all forever;
and blessed is your holy and glorious name.
Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory.
Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom.
Blessed are you who look into the depths
from your throne upon the cherubim,
praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

Brothers and sisters, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another,
agree with one another, live in peace,
and the God of love and peace will be with you.
Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the holy ones greet you.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life.
For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.
Whoever believes in him will not be condemned,
but whoever does not believe has already been condemned,
because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Excerpts from Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9; Daniel 3:52-56; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; and John 3:16-18

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for June 4th, the feast of the Holy Trinity, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. We have a short and very familiar gospel from John. In it, Jesus explains, "God so loved the world that he gave his Son, so everyone who believes in him might have eternal life. God did not send his Son to condemn the world but to save it. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned."

The other readings also have references to the persons of the Trinity, and encounters with them. In the first reading from Exodus, the Lord came down in a cloud to Moses on Mount Sinai, passed before him there and proclaimed his name, "Lord," and proclaimed himself a merciful and gracious God. Moses asked the Lord to receive the people as his own. In the responsorial psalm from Daniel are words from a song of praise, "Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestors, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever." In the second reading, from the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "Encourage one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."

This is the third week in a row where the most specific and descriptive words for the celebrated feast come not from the Gospel but from one of the other readings. In the past two weeks, we had first readings from Acts that provided the detailed descriptions of the Ascension and Pentecost. This week, on the feast of the Holy Trinity, it is in the second reading that we hear one of the clearest Trinitarian passages in the New Testament, referencing together the Father, Son, and Spirit. Like in the previous two weeks, this of course takes nothing away from the relevance of the gospel—instead, it enhances it. One more point: the words from the book of Daniel, used as the responsorial psalm, are the words sung to glorify God during their encounter with him from within the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. May the Father, Son, and Spirit remain with you always!

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!