

(U) TRINITY SUNDAY

(JUNE 7TH, 2020)

Readings for Today: *Exodus 34: 4 – 6, 8 – 9; Canticle from Daniel 3; John 3: 16 – 18.*

Today's Feast is a comparative late-comer to the calendar, and one of the surprising facts about it is that it was particularly popular among the English – supposedly more concerned for Christian conduct than Christian doctrine.

The choice of readings for the feast cannot be easy, because the word 'Trinity' doesn't occur in scripture, and there are few New Testament passages which refer explicitly to the three persons of the Godhead – Father, Son, and Spirit. But, as today's second reading makes clear, from the earliest days Christian teachers knew that God was at work in them in three distinct, but different, ways. They recognised the Father as the loving source of all that exists. They knew Jesus as the Son of the Father, through whose gracious – that is freely given – offering of himself they had been reconciled to the Father. They experienced the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives, binding individual Christians together into the Body of Christ.

But the process by which these fundamental Christian experiences led to the formulation of a doctrine of 'Three Persons in One God' was a very long one, and began from the need to rule out certain inadequate answers to the question of how Father, Son and Spirit are related to one another. So, for example, it was necessary to rule out the ideas that the Son, who was incarnate as Jesus, was a second-class divinity, or that the Spirit only came into existence through the Son. In finding a satisfactory answer to such problems Christian theologians drew their inspiration from liturgical practice – from what the Church does in worship. Baptism in the threefold name was universal from the second century, and was seen as making a disciple a member of the Body of Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

In the end the Church, Eastern and Western, accepted a formula which, as Saint Augustine writes, it uses, not for its own sake (because it is absolutely true and says everything that can be said), but so that the Church is not reduced to silence about the mystery of God's being.

In the now little-used Athanasian Creed the Church teaches: 'The Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity', and that is what really matters – that we give our worship to the mystery of God, revealed to us in the life of the Church.