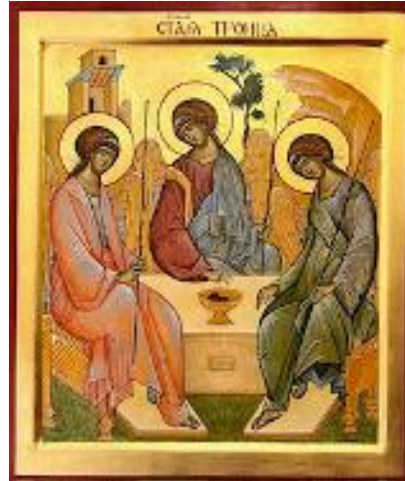


A sermon preached on Trinity Sunday, May 31, 2026
at Trinity Episcopal Church, Wethersfield CT, by The Rt. Rev. Gordon Scruton

Genesis 1:1-2:4. 2 Corinthians 13:11-13. Matthew 28:16-20



Last Sunday we celebrated the Great Feast of Pentecost, when God sent the fresh wind of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, to enter his followers, igniting in them the fire of love, joy, and wisdom that they saw flowing through Jesus. This Holy Spirit guided and empowered them to keep practicing and talking about the love and Good News of Jesus in the languages of the great crowd of people who gathered around them that day representing all nations of the world.

So, after that awesome experience, what do we celebrate on the Sunday after Pentecost? What comes next?

For the next almost 1500 years, most Christians celebrated All Saints Sunday on the Sunday after Pentecost. They celebrated the ways in which God's Spirit continued to flow through God's people through all the generations. The Eastern Orthodox churches still celebrate All Saints Sunday on the Sunday after Pentecost. My preference would be to celebrate All Saints this Sunday with the long history of our Christian ancestors.

However, over time, some Christians in the Western Churches wanted to find a Sunday to honor and celebrate the Holy Trinity. They thought, the Spirit of Pentecost will eventually lead God's people into the Glory of God. So, on the Sunday after Pentecost, shouldn't we celebrate God the Holy Trinity who is our source, our sustainer and our ultimate goal and destination for all eternity? After centuries of debate in the Western Church, in 1499, Pope Alexander VI declared that the Sunday after Pentecost would be devoted to celebrating the Holy Trinity. So today, as Western Christians, we celebrate the gift of God, the Holy Trinity.

Perhaps, in our worship today, we can embrace both ways Christians celebrate the Sunday after Pentecost. Thinking about the ancient tradition of celebrating All Saints today, can help us realize that when we speak about the Trinity, we are not talking about some complicated doctrine that none of us can explain or fully understand. When we speak about God the Trinity, we speak

about allowing the fullness of God to shine in and through our lives as human beings, as the light of Christ has continued to radiate into the world through saintly people in all generations. To be a congregation named for the Trinity is not to focus on a doctrine or the complexity of God. Rather, we are here to open ourselves again, to allow the fullness of the one God who is Love, and comes to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit to shine in and through our lives and our congregation into our neighborhood and into the whole world.

When you and I struggle to understand or explain the Trinity, it is helpful to remember that the first disciples had difficulty understanding or figuring out who Jesus was and what he was trying to teach them. They had all grown up as Jewish children, learning about the God revealed through the Hebrew Scriptures, the God who created all things that exist, as we heard in today's first reading from Genesis. They learned about the God who came to Abraham as three angels who looked like men. They learned about the God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush, the God who could speak to us through creation. And they learned from the Prophets how God continually calls us to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. This was the God they knew about from their conversations with God and their families and in the Scriptures they heard in the Synagogue and Temple.

Then they met Jesus. After living with him over his three years of ministry, their understanding of God began to change. Even after the resurrection, most did not fully recognize that Jesus was God with them in person. As we heard in today's Gospel, some still doubted. So, we have good company when we have our doubts. Yet Christ came to their doubting minds. Remember Thomas? When he recognized the scars on the Risen Jesus, he said, "My Lord and my God." He recognized in Jesus the presence of same God he had talked with and trusted all his life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is about to leave his disciples and ascend to be with his Father in heaven. His parting words were: "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and for the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you, and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." His disciples wondered, what does this mean?

Nine days later, as the wind of God's Spirit come upon them at Pentecost, they experienced the powerful, burning presence of God flowing through them, as they saw it flow through Jesus. The Spirit flowed through them as they preached and healed and faced persecution and even death. They experienced the one God of the Hebrew Bible, the God who was alive in Jesus, was also alive in them through the Holy Spirit.

And about 25 years later, in today's 2nd reading, Paul concludes his letter to the Corinthians by saying, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." So, Paul and the Christian communities were continuing to experience the Divine Life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit flowing in and through their lives.

While Jesus and Paul never say the word "Trinity", the early Christians, and Christians down through the centuries have continued, as Jesus and Paul taught them, to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and to experience the presence of God the Trinity guiding their lives.

So, let's explore a few ways Christians down through the centuries have kept alive their experience of the Holy Trinity flowing in and through their daily lives.

Early Celtic Christians developed many prayers that helped to connect them with the Trinity in their daily chores. For example, when they woke up, many began the day by pouring a handful of water over their face 3 times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit to renew their relationship with God begun at their baptism and to receive a fresh transfusion of God's presence, strength, guidance and grace for this new day.

We began this service by singing an ancient hymn text (Hymn 370) often called St Patrick's breastplate because St Patrick taught people to use a prayer like this as they dressed in the morning. In those days, they had no buttons or zippers, only leather strips to tie their clothes together. So, as they said, "I bind unto myself today," they were binding or tying on their clothes and also prayerfully thinking of tying around them the Trinity, binding the life and Spirit of Christ and all creation around their bodies, like God's spiritual armor to protect and guide them through the coming day.

As the women lit the morning fire and milked the cow for the morning breakfast, they had special prayers for those tasks. When they ate, they would invite the God the Holy Trinity to bless the food. They had prayers for banking the fire at the end of the day and for going to bed.

When the men and boys walked to the fields and the women walked to the market or to a neighbor's house, they had walking prayers, giving them a sense that God was walking with them. For many years I have enjoyed prayerfully repeating one Celtic prayer as I go on walks, because of the gentle joy woven into the prayer:

My walk this day with the Father, my walk this day with Christ, my walk this day with the Spirit, the Threefold all kindly, Ho! Ho! Ho! the Threefold all kindly. The Father to guide me, Christ to guide me, the Spirit to guide me, As three and as One, Ho! Ho! Ho! as Three and as One. ... (Adapted from God Under My Roof by Esther deWaal, p.27)

The Celts saw and spoke about the Trinity with very ordinary examples like the following:
 "Three folds of the cloth, yet only one napkin is there,
 Three joints in the finger, but still only one finger fair
 Three leaves of the shamrock, yet no more than one shamrock to wear,
 Frost, snowflakes and ice, all in water their origin share
 Three Persons in God; to one God alone we make prayer." (The Celtic Way of Prayer, by Esther De Waal, p. 39)

And the 17th Century Welshman, Morgan Llwyd wrote: "The Trinity abides with us exactly the same as the ore in the earth, ...or a child in the womb, or a fire in a stove, ... so is the Trinity in the godly." (Ibid p. 40)

Since the 15th Century, Orthodox Christians and more recently Christians all around the world have found it lifegiving to pray with the Trinity through a famous Russian Icon by Andrei Rublev which is printed at the top of this sermon. This is a visual expression of the story of three men described as God or angels visiting and having a meal with Abraham. (Genesis 18:1-8) On the left is the Father. Jesus said "In my father's house are many mansions", and you see the mansion over the head of the Father; in the center behind the altar is Jesus, blessing the lamb/Eucharist on the altar; on the right is

the Holy Spirit, head leaning toward Jesus, who is leaning toward the Father, who is in turn learning toward them, showing the loving relationship that flows constantly through the Trinity. God is a community of flowing love, peace and unity. If you look at the front of the altar, you will see a small rectangle. That represents an opening through which you and I can enter into the icon and experience the loving interdependent relationship of the Holy Trinity surrounding us.

After hearing how our Celtic and Russian spiritual ancestors have experienced and prayed with the Trinity, perhaps God asks us on this Trinity Sunday: In what ways are you and I growing in our relationship with God the Holy Trinity who is always with us, whether we recognize it or not?

Often, we are all distracted and pre-occupied with the anxieties and relentless busyness of life and we fail to recognize this Divine reality that lives within us and around us throughout each day.

So let me suggest 3 possible ways you might intentionally practice being open to God the Holy Trinity each day this week. I have found all three of these ways of prayer helpful in my experience.

First--Like the early Celts, we could begin each day by putting three handfuls of water on our faces in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to renew our Baptism covenant and ask the Trinity to make us fully alive with God throughout the coming day.

Second-- You could use the Trinity icon at the top of this sermon and spend a few minutes every day gazing into this icon and asking the Spirit to help you enter into and just sit in the flowing love of God the Holy Trinity which surrounds you.

Third-- You could take home the little prayer card which you received this morning. (See this prayer at the end of the sermon.) This is called the Stillness Prayer. It is a quote from Psalm 46:10. The prayer does not mention the Trinity by name, yet it leads us into connection with God the Holy Trinity.

Recently I learned that several parishes in Minnesota have printed this prayer on a card like this and people carry it with them throughout the day. They notice whenever they are anxious or fearful or confused. In those moments they try to pause, take a deep breath, and slowly pray this prayer. They practice doing this several times a day and have found it helps to re-connect them with God. Sometimes, when they see others around them are frazzled, and the situation seems appropriate, they invite the other person to take a deep breath and they pray the card together.

I wonder, what has God been saying to you this Trinity Sunday?

Let's close our eyes, take a deep breath and be aware that God the Holy Trinity is right here with us, personally and as a community...

Which of the prayer practices mentioned in this sermon might you be drawn to use every day this week, to help you experience living in closer relationship with the Holy Trinity?...

In closing, please hold the Be Still prayer...take another slow deep breath...and whisper it with me:

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

AMEN.