

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY – YEAR B

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity – a mystery that lies at the heart of our Christian faith. Though the word ‘Trinity’ does not appear in the Bible and is not easily defined, it was central to the experience of early believers, as it is central to our own. Our Christian identity is defined by our baptism ‘in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’, and we acknowledge the Trinity whenever we make the sign of the cross.

Second Reading Romans 8: 14–17

St Paul’s letter to the Romans is placed first in the New Testament, though it is by no means the earliest of the epistles. Here Paul is writing to the church in Rome, which included both Jews and Gentiles – a church he hopes to visit in the near future. His intention is not to correct specific problems there, but to provide a solid foundation for the Christian life and his future ministry among them. Rather than seeking to make the Romans change their lives out of fear, Paul emphasises confidence and gratitude arising from what God has done for them, and will continue to do.

In today’s passage for Trinity Sunday, Paul does not ‘explain’ the Trinity as such, but he uses clear ‘Trinitarian language’ where the Father, the Son and the Spirit are all closely interrelated.

The Romans placed a high value on **children as heirs** to their wealth. Rich, infertile couples would often adopt unwanted children. These adopted children had the same inheritance rights as biological children.

Jesus received the Spirit at his baptism and the voice of God proclaimed Jesus as God’s Son (Matthew 3: 17). In the same way, we receive the Spirit through our own baptism and so become God’s children, **coheirs with Christ**. This is how we, too, can confidently call God ‘**Abba, Father**’ as Jesus did on Gethsemane (Mark 14: 36), and we can say the prayer Jesus has given us with the same confidence: ‘Our Father ...’

As with Christ, this identity nevertheless entails suffering ‘**so as to share his glory**’. Jesus himself explained this to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: ‘*Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter his glory?*’ (Luke 24: 26).

Gospel Matthew 28: 16–20

These four verses come at the very end of Matthew’s Gospel, recording the last known encounter between Jesus and his disciples, and his final words to them.

The mountain in Galilee

Mountains have a symbolic value. They are usually places difficult to access. By arranging to meet the disciples in Galilee, Jesus implicitly invites them to remember the beginning of their journey together.

The disciples’ reaction: worship and doubt

The disciples’ reactions are in line with the way they behaved during the Resurrection appearances: some were overcome; some doubted. The original Greek may nevertheless imply not that there were two distinct groups of people (‘the worshippers’ and ‘the doubters’), but rather the phrase might mean ‘they worshipped but had doubts’.

The Great Commission

This is the name traditionally given to the three sayings of Jesus given below. It is a concise description of what the Early Church considered its role to be. The new Christians act by virtue of this commission. This same commission is given to all disciples, and to us – even if we, like them, sometimes have doubts or hesitations.

* ‘All authority has been given to me’

Elsewhere Jesus shows his authority over nature (the calming of the storm Mk 4: 35–41), and over spirits (the Gerasene demoniac: Mk 5: 1–21). God is the source of his authority, as Jesus mentions earlier in his ministry (Mt 11: 27).

* ‘Make disciples of all the nations’

Whereas Matthew’s main audience is made up of Jewish people, Jesus now seeks to reach all nationalities and races.

* ‘Baptise and teach them’

The disciples’ work is clearly defined. They are to do this in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Greek word for baptise also means ‘to immerse’, not necessarily in water. The disciples, through their teaching of the Christian way of life, are to ‘immerse’ their new followers in the presence of God: above them (the Father); beside them (the Son); and within them (the Spirit).

‘I am with you always’

These last words of Matthew’s Gospel take us back to its beginning, recalling the Annunciation (cf the Fourth Sunday of Advent): ‘*They shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God is with us”*’ (Mt 1: 23).

The living presence of Jesus among us comforts and reassures us in our mission of evangelisation.