



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

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Sunday, June 3, 2007

Trinity Sunday

Festal Eucharist

at 11am

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A Sermon by

The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector

on

Saint John 16:5-15

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THE TRINITY: THE GOD OF JESUS

All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he [the Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Almost every sermon here follows the old custom invoking the full name of God as revealed by Jesus Christ; that is the Holy and Undivided Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (or Spirit). The Rector *emeritus* often invokes this name with the descriptive preface, “In the Name of the true and living God,” which helps me begin this sermon for Trinity Sunday. Far from being merely a doctrine in the creeds, the Holy and Undivided Trinity is the unfathomable mystery of God’s very life and being.

I do not mean to diminish the importance of the Church’s creed. I will get to that briefly. But first and foremost we need to appreciate the fact that the Trinity is not some man-made or church-invented construct, dated centuries after the simple Gospel of Jesus was first preached. Far from it. The Holy and Undivided Trinity is, simply, the true and living God taught and revealed by Jesus, as in today’s Gospel according to Saint John and in other places too many to recount in a homily.

One of the most striking contributions of Jesus of Nazareth to the knowledge of God is his constant use of the word *Abba*, Father. You can count on your fingers the number of times God the Lord is called or likened to a father in the enormous Old Testament collection of Scripture. But in the few hundred pages of the New Testament, God is directly named *Abba*, Father, 137 times,¹ principally on the lips of Jesus himself.

Secondly, Jesus spoke and acted as though he were in the place of God. It got him into trouble. The evil spirits seemed to appreciate the divinity of Christ more than his followers did. The opponents and enemies of Jesus, similarly, seemed to grasp the import of his speech and acts as much as or even more than his disciples; except, instead of following him, they condemned him for blasphemy (or demonic possession, or madness). “Who is this, who forgives sins?” His teaching of the Kingdom of God made them suppose he was thinking of himself as its King (or the King’s Son). His miracles, far from convincing his adversaries of his goodness and union with God, drove them to a murderous frenzy. Jesus did not go around saying, “I am God”; but the cumulative effect of his words and deeds, together with his own confessions when put on the spot, are overwhelming. And so it was, on Easter, when Jesus appeared to Saint Thomas after his Resurrection, that he accepted the declaration of our Patron Saint: “My Lord and my God!” You can see that scene on the tableau just above the high altar.

¹ Had I checked Joachim Jeremias’ *The Prayers of Jesus* I would have said 170 times in the Gospels alone! Op.cit. pp. 29ff.

Thirdly, Jesus, as we see in today's Gospel, spoke of his going away, and of his sending from the Father the *Paraclete*, the Holy Spirit, to be the Person of God in his place, to empower his Church and to guide it into all truth. "He (the Holy Spirit) will take what is mine and give it to you." This means that the disciples were no longer to be, as it were, an inward-looking circle gathered around the incarnate figure of Jesus. When Jesus ascended to the Father, sending the Holy Spirit in his place, the circle was turned inside out, and the disciples were filled with the Spirit to preach and live the Gospel to the ends of the earth and through the ages of time until now.

What is most important to realize is that as the Spirit came to the Church, those disciples were transformed into the bold members and witnesses of the Body of Christ. They entered the Kingdom of God preached by Christ, lived by its principles, and enjoyed its life. In a word, *they were drawn into very life of God the Holy and Undivided Trinity*. They were moved by the Spirit. They were made members of the family of the King's Son; they became his adopted brothers and sisters, members of Christ's body and bride, Holy Mother Church; and finally, they prayed with confidence, "*Abba, Father*", as God's sons and daughters by faith and repentance.

Now a word about doctrine. Doctrine is to the Gospel literature as grammar is to language. If our grammar deteriorates, our ability to speak, communicate and understand is corrupted until, at last, we speak nonsense. This is why the Church has her creeds. They define and summarize the Good News of Jesus about God. If you want to learn more about them, come to the Rector's Doctrine Class. For now, suffice it to say that the doctrine of the Trinity places in balanced tension the two great truths of Holy Scripture. First, that there is but one true and living God. Second, that the Gospel of Jesus has revealed this God as three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, believe and know that you live and breathe in the Holy and Undivided Trinity, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me finish with an ancient Celtic rune from the Scottish Highlands, a preface to prayer. I have used it before in this pulpit, but it bears repeating. I use it myself many mornings. You might think of some of these words today as you kneel to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion.

"I am bending my knee
In the eye of the Father who created me,
In the eye of the Son who purchased me,
In the eye of the Spirit who cleansed me,
In friendship and affection.
Through thine own Anointed One, O God,
Bestow upon us fullness in our need,
Love towards God,
The affection of God,
The smile of God,
The wisdom of God,
The grace of God,
The fear of God,
And the will of God
To do on the world of the Three,
As angels and saints do in heaven;
Each shade and light,
Each day and night,
Each time in kindness,
Give Thou us thy Spirit."²

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

² *Celtic Invocations*, Alexander Carmichael, "Rune Before Prayer," p. 37.