

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Isaiah 6:1-8

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ² Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" ⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷ The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Commentary

This vision of God's glory came to the prophet Isaiah in the year King Uzziah died, about 742 B.C. The death of Uzziah, one of Judah's last truly powerful monarchs, may have been a signal to perceptive persons that changes in the fortunes of the nation were on their way and that, in significant ways, Judah would stand in special need of God's grace in the years ahead. If so, the opening lines of this text stand as a reminder that the Spirit of God often works through the events of our days to draw our attention to God's will for human life. While worshiping in the Temple, Isaiah "saw" the Lord, an astounding assertion given the Old Testament belief that no one could see God and live. If one word were to be employed to express the mood of our text it would be "awe." A "holy" God has taken the initiative to address a weak and sinful mortal, and the prophet is almost paralyzed with a sense of God's power and his own inadequacy. The sense of mission on the part of God's people flows directly out of an understanding of who God is. Even the seraphim must shield their faces before God's awful majesty (v. 2) and, when they sing, their words are of God's otherness, or holiness. Only the live coal, a symbol of the justice and compassion of God, can serve to purify the prophet and render him fit for service to this King of majesty. This God of Glory is a God who is consistent and reliable in dealing with humankind; a God of justice and love. This holy God summons the people of God to live lives characterized by the same persistent principles. Central to the reality of this text is the transforming power of God's presence. The act of cleansing the prophet's lips not only restores

the condition of wholeness to a sinful person, but also releases that person's power to hear God's speech and in turn to speak God's words to a sinful people.

Reflection

1. Isaiah's vision presents the image of God as a king. There are many other images for God in Isaiah, including father, mother, shepherd, warrior and potter. How do you think of God? What might be gained by playing with a variety of images for God?
2. God often works through the events of the world to draw our attention to God's will for humanity. In what ways have you seen God working through ordinary, everyday events?

Romans 8:12-17

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh –
¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.
¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Commentary

In this densely packed paragraph, Paul describes life in the Spirit and how the believer is changed by faith in Christ. Using a style of argumentation common among Greek philosophers, Paul draws sharp contrasts between flesh and spirit, life and death, slavery and adoption. His strong rhetoric asserts a radical new reality: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ... he has set you free from the law of sin and death." (8:1-2). When Paul contrasts "flesh" and "spirit," he does not mean that the human body is inherently evil. Rather, he sees "flesh" and "spirit" as two different spheres of power that act upon human nature. To "live according to the flesh" means a system of values opposed to God's will, as when healthy sexual desire is perverted into lust. Life in the Spirit is led according to God's will, to whom we cry out with words of intimate affection ("Abba" – "Papa"). This passage was chosen for Trinity Sunday because it describes the work of all three persons of the Trinity: Christ restores us to right relationship with God; the Holy Spirit leads us and bears witness in our hearts; the Father adopts us as children and heirs. Paul is more concerned with describing what the Godhead does than with its identity. The equality, mutuality, and interdependence within the Trinity form the nucleus of a new family into which all believers are adopted.

Reflection

1. Some Christians believe that the human body is evil, a source of temptation and sin. Do you agree? What should the church teach about the body?

2. What values or behaviors do you associate with “flesh” and with “Spirit”? What is the effect of each behavior on the individual and on others?

John 3:1-17

¹ Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³ Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Commentary

This text predates the Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries and later, when the church reflected on the mysterious nature of the Trinity and the language of Greek philosophy. Yet this text is chosen for Trinity Sunday because of the reflection it offers about the triune nature of God. The narrative confronts us initially with the Spirit, the unpredictable, uncontrollable activity of God, who is compared with the wind. The evidence of the Spirit (or the wind) is there, but it defies empirical investigation and resists any attempt at manipulation. Two aspects of the Spirit emerge in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. First, the Spirit and the flesh are radically distinct, two separate realms. "Flesh" denotes creaturely existence as it operates and organizes itself apart from the presence of God, whereas "Spirit" denotes the divine activity "from above" which breaks into and disrupts the purely human. The second thing affirmed of the Spirit in this text is that the only way of entering God's realm comes "from above," from the action of God, the Spirit, who effects new creation. The language of rebirth (really birth "from above") highlights the incongruity between the old and the new, between the personal and social structures of life that presume to function without God and the invasive, reorienting power of the new. Nicodemus is called to accept the unaccountable gift of the new. The Son of Man (Christ, the second person of the Trinity) is the link between heaven and earth. Just as the ladder in Jacob's dream at Bethel enabled the angels of God to go back and forth between heaven and earth in Genesis 28, so the

Son of Man is the ladder making possible communication from the opened heaven to earth. The revelation of God brought by the Son of Man does not consist of theological abstractions, but of action which results in the offer of life, life of the age to come. The revelation is the power for redemption.

Reflection

1. Jesus uses the movement of the wind to help us understand the working of the Spirit. Where have you seen the wind of the Spirit at work?
2. When you think about or pray to God, which person of the Trinity do you imagine? The Spirit? The Son? The Father? Has it always been that way for you or have you “grown” and changed your relationship with the individual members of the Godhead?

Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 29

- ¹ Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- ² **Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendor.**
- ³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.
- ⁴ **The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.**
- ⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁶ The LORD makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- ⁷ **The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.**
- ⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- ⁹ The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, "Glory!"
- ¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.
- ¹¹ **May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!**

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.