

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER ~ 14 May 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

We are two weeks away from Pentecost. Today's readings in the Liturgy of the Word begin to ease us into images of the Holy Spirit who will be at the heart of Pentecost.



In the first reading from Acts, we learn about Philip's bringing of the good news to Samaria, ending with the baptism of many and works of healing. "There was great joy in that city." In the second half of the reading, Peter and John were sent to Samaria by the Apostles in Jerusalem to place their hands on the believers so that they would receive the Spirit. The story is not complete with baptism and healing; the coming of the Spirit is needed to bring fullness to the Christian community and Christian believers at Samaria.

The second reading from 1 Peter explains why this is so, "Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Pet 3:18). Christ is made alive in the Spirit, thus enabling him to bring us to God. The first part of the reading cautions us that, when making our defense to account for the hope that we have, we must do so with gentleness and reverence. This image of the Spirit is profound – bringing life to the Christ that he might bring us to God, so filling us with hope despite all the realities around us that people challenge our integrity, and encouraging us to respond with gentleness and reverence.

We are reminded of the words of the liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, as he reflects on God's first named covenant in Genesis – the covenant with all Earth and all Earth beings (Gen 9:8-17):

Human beings must feel that they are sons and daughters of the rainbow, those who translate this divine covenant with all the beings existing and living, with new relationships of kindness, compassion, cosmic solidarity, and deep reverence for the mystery that each one bears and reveals.

Only then will there be integral liberation, of the human being and of Earth, and rather than the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth there will be common celebration of the redeemed and the freed, human beings in our own house, on our good, great, and bountiful Mother Earth.



Psalm 66 echoes these words of Boff, celebrating God's covenant with all beings existing and living, "Make a joyful noise to the God, all the earth; sing the glory of God's name." Think of all the ways in which Earth makes a joyful noise to God – the gentle breeze blowing through the leaves, the raindrops falling on the flowers, the brook gently dancing over the rocks, the waves rolling on the beach, the gulls crying out, the sheep bleating as they graze, the baby giggling as she catches her toes, the teenage boy teaching his little brother to throw a ball, the young woman reciting her own poetry, the woman religious praying with a dying patient, the old man singing songs from his memory – all making joyful noise to their God, all held in the reverent embrace of the gentle Spirit.

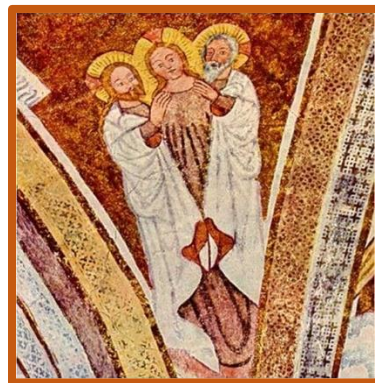
In John's Gospel, we listen again to Jesus' words just before his death. In these words, Jesus makes a promise, "I will ask the Father who will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. . . the Spirit of truth . . . who abides with you and will be in you" (Jn 14:16-17). The qualities that Jesus emphasizes for the Spirit are "truth," "abiding with" and "being with." Jesus goes on to say, "Because I live, you will also live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:19). In this Gospel account as well as in Acts and 1 Peter, we see the beginnings of our image of God as Trinity (Father, Jesus, Spirit), Trinity abiding with us and being with us.



While Trinity is not fully developed in the New Testament (it will be in later Church Councils), we see in these three texts the sense of relationship that is at the heart of Trinity. The theologian, Roger Haight, in his latest book, *The Nature of Theology*, follows theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez and describes Trinity in this way, "God, as Creator, Mediator and Spirit can only be appropriated as 'Presence,' each individually

and all as one." He believes that God is encountered subjectively by the person, and that encounter is wholly relational, "Revelation of God includes revelation of self in relation to God and God to the self." The hope that is named in 1 Peter flows from this relationship described by Haight, "Out of love for a suffering world, we dare to give an account of our enduring hope in the God of creation; in Jesus Christ, who reveals the character of God; and in the Spirit of God, who liberates human freedom and provides the courage to help realize and defend God's dream for humanity."

Given the importance of "presence" and "relationship" in understanding the Trinity, we need to revisit our image of the Spirit as a dove ("peristeran", a feminine noun). It is a beautifully ecological image, but it can be an image which makes it difficult to see the Spirit in relationship with us, as one who abides in us. In the Old Testament, the word for "Spirit" is "ruach," a feminine noun which is translated in our New Testament passages by the Greek word "pneuma" which is a neuter noun. The image of Woman Wisdom ("Hokmah" in Hebrew, "Sophia" in Greek, and "Sapientia" in Latin – all feminine nouns) has been used by theologians since the early Church fathers to describe the Spirit. Indeed, there is a 4<sup>th</sup> century medieval fresco from a church in Germany which shows the Trinity as father (an older man), son (a younger man), and spirit (a younger woman). Many recent theologians image the Spirit as female. For many years now, I see, speak about, and pray to the Spirit as female as I do to Jesus as male. This has deepened my sense of Trinity, understood and loved through presence and relationship.



***The Trinity***  
**St. Jakobus (Urschalling)**

In many parts of the world including Canada and Peru, today is Mother's Day. The liturgist, Cara Heafey, has written a beautiful prayer to the Trinity which ascribes the image of mother to each member of the Trinity, building on the many images of God as mother in the Old Testament, the growing images of the Spirit as female, and Jesus' own description of himself as a mother hen (Matt 23:37):

Mothering God, you birthed the universe into being.  
Home-maker, your creation is habitat and sustenance to all that lives.  
How costly for you our freedom must be.

How painful the separation  
From the parent who has numbered the hairs on our head  
And written our names on her heart.

Mothering Jesus, you shed your blood to give us life.  
Of your own flesh, you fed us, saying "this is my body, broken for you."  
You taught us with authority and endless patience, how to live and how to love.  
You beheld your lost and wandering children  
And longed to gather us in  
As a hen sheltering her brood beneath her wings.

Mothering Spirit, you dance and weave in the spaces between us.  
We hear you in the echoes of the stories our mothers told us  
And in the songs their voices sang.  
You pull the threads that connect us to one another  
And to those who have gone ahead of us.  
Yours is the deep wisdom beyond words, the love that calls us home.

On this Mother's Day, we thank our God as Mother and we thank God for our mothers who have given us life, have sustained us in our growth, and hold us in love whether they are still on Earth or are in their eternal home forever connected with us by a very thin veil. We conclude with the prayer-poem of Rev. Dr. Laura, celebrating our mothers and the image of God that they have been and are for us:

The universe yet incomplete,  
on the sixth day God created her  
Woman  
and God said to her, I shall give you  
A heart full of compassion  
a spirit free to fly with the birds  
a vessel to carry life into the world  
Wisdom to know great truths  
courage to rise out of oppression  
Strength to move mountains  
gentleness to kiss the earth  
Passion to set the world on fire  
vision to respect the earth that bore you  
A playful nature to dance with the children  
laughter to fill the valleys  
tears to wash the pain away  
Hands for laboring and loving  
intuition to know the unknown  
desire to be that which you were created to be  
and God said to her  
Woman  
I have created you in my image and likeness and  
You are good



Happy Mother's Day!