

Introduction to the day

When we say God is the triune God, we are saying something about who God is beyond, before, and after the universe: that there is community within God. Our experience of this is reflected in Paul's words today. When we pray to God as Jesus prayed to his Abba (an everyday, intimate parental address), the Spirit prays within us, creating between us and God the same relationship Jesus has with the one who sent him.

Prayer of the Day:

Let us pray.

Almighty Creator and ever-living God: we worship your glory, eternal Three-in-One, and we praise your power, majestic One-in-Three. Keep us steadfast in this faith, defend us in all adversity, and bring us at last into your presence, where you live in endless joy and love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Isaiah 6:1-8

A reading from Isaiah.

This reading narrates Isaiah's vision of the Lord surrounded by angels. They sing "Holy, holy, holy," a song the church sings at the beginning of the great thanksgiving. This liturgical text invites the church and all creation to sing in praise of God's glory. That glory is God's mercy toward sinners.

PSALM: Psalm 29

Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. (Ps. 29:2)

SECOND READING: Romans 8:12-17

A reading from Romans.

In describing the new life of faith, Paul refers to all three persons of the Trinity: the Spirit leads us to recognize that we are children of God the Father and joint heirs with Christ the Son.

GOSPEL: John 3:1-17

Jesus' miracles prompt Nicodemus to visit him in secrecy. Jesus tells him about being born of the Spirit and about the Son who has been sent by God to save.

GOSPEL MESSAGE

How Can These Things Be?

Given the many heated encounters between Jesus and Pharisees, the term *Pharisee* has become, for some, another word for "enemy of truth" or "opponent of God's promises for the world." In communities where divisions over what is true and false, good and bad, have become iron-clad, often rankling relationships, it may seem familiar—even honorable—to hiss at Pharisees. But that wasn't Jesus' way.

Think first about people like the Samaritan woman at the well, or a centurion in Rome's brutal occupying army, or a scandalous prostitute, or an executioner driving nails into Jesus' flesh—people that might have been easily discarded. Yet Jesus related to them in compassion and mercy, not exclusion.

Then think of Nicodemus, meeting Jesus at night, calling him "a teacher who has come from God." Nicodemus is a Pharisee but he is hardly an enemy of truth opposing God's way in the world. Moreover,

with one word, “we,” he includes other Pharisees like himself who wish to accompany Jesus in God’s kingdom.

The perplexing nighttime conversation that leaves Nicodemus in a state of wonderment—”How can these things be?”—leads to Jesus’ climactic revelation: “God so loved the world . . .” In the gospel’s original Greek, “world” (*kosmos*) indicates that literally every bit of the universe receives God’s mercy and compassion, saving us all from perishing into iron-clad division between who is in and who is out.

How can these things be? On this Sunday that celebrates the wonder of the Trinity, the answer comes from God the Creator, saying that creation is good; from God the Redeemer, teaching us to love the world as God loves it; and from God the Spirit, continuing to draw us into wonderment. That’s how this can be.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

We come before the triune God to pray for our communities, ourselves, and our world.

Abba God, you have brought us into your family, claiming us as beloved children. Bless your family of faith with gifts of cooperation and graciousness. Increase our hospitality toward all expressions of faith and teach us to honor our shared humanity. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We acknowledge these confirmands in their desire to affirm their Baptism to you. May they live their life with you in their minds. Merciful God, **receive our prayer**

Your love and power burst forth in the flashes of lightning, the dance of the wind, and the deeply rooted trees of the forest. Sustain fragile and interconnected ecosystems, that they flourish for generations to come. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Give your blessing of peace to the nations. Shelter all who risk life and livelihood to protect others from violence, conflict, and injustice. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You are a God of love and not of condemnation. Quiet the hearts of all who struggle with shame, regret, or questions of self-worth. Teach us to forgive ourselves and one another. Restore wholeness to all who seek hope and healing. We *especially pray for* Sandra Gagnon, Karen Weigold, Keith Weckwerth, Karen O’Day, Shirley Glickman, Marilyn Schneider, Denita Wolfgram, Stephanie Yourth, Christopher Yourth, Linda Boland, Glenda Panke, Harold Yourth, Debbie Thom, Donna L Hoffman, Walter Hobden, Gary Churchill and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. In this moment of silence we name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts those who need your healing touch. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Strengthen bonds between parents, children, and families of all varieties. We pray especially for adoptive and foster families, multi-generational households, and blended families. Grant gifts of nurture and patience to all caregivers. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

The Spirit bears grateful witness to all children of God who have now come into their inheritance among the saints. As they lived with hope in your gift of eternal life, so strengthen us in faith, that we recognize your eternal presence even in this mortal life. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Receive our prayers, O God, and come quickly to our aid, through the power of the Spirit and the love of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

BLESSING (ELW p. 183)

The Lord bless you and keep you.

Page | 3

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace.

Amen.

SENDING SONG *I Love to Tell the Story* (ELW 661)

DISMISSAL (ELW p. 183) Assisting minister

Go in peace. Share the good news.

Thanks be to God.

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