

TRINITY SUNDAY

THE EIGHTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- May 22** **THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY**
God as the Model for Living Love
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant
- MON** **Monday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time**
23 **The Transforming Worship of the Triune God**
A reflection taken from a hymn by St. Gregory Nazianzen
- TUES** **Tuesday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time**
24 **Day of Prayer for the Deceased**
 The Backbone of the Life of Faith
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant
- WED** **Memorial of St. Bede the Venerable**
25 **The Life of Transforming Prayer**
A reflection developed from a text by the Venerable Bede
- THURS** **Thursday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time**
26 **Renewing Trinitarian Life within Us**
A reflection developed from a text by Didymus the Blind
- FRI** **Memorial of St. Augustine of Canterbury**
20 **The Evangelizing Power of a Christian Community**
Inspired by a text of the Venerable Bede
- SAT** **Memorial of Our Lady**
21 **Praying to Mary as our Mother**
A prayer to Mary by St. Pope John Paul II

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God's as the Model for Living Love

A reflection developed from a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth." When we pray the creed we remind ourselves that God is known to us primarily as a giver of unlimited generosity. Today's reading from the Book of Proverbs reminds that creation's splendor reflects God's beauty and goodness. Nothing can resist God creating love and this is shown in the order of our world and all the ways it nourishes and sustains us. Everything proclaims, "God made me! Isn't God wonderful!" All is offered as a gift and entrusted to us so we can share it with others. God is giver of goodness and beauty and asks us only that we do for others what is being done for us. God wants to do it through us and with us.

"I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord". Creation is a gift that only shows us our God a little at a time, and in a way many people miss out on the message. God's greatest gift is the Son, revealed to us in Jesus. If we come to know Jesus we can't miss understanding what God is. In the Letter to the Romans, from which today's second reading is taken, all our attention is fixed on the "salvation" given us in Jesus. We are offered the gift of an eternal life which is the sharing in divine life itself. Do we want to know how God's gives and loves, then we need only look to Jesus. This new relationship to God shows us that God not only gives but is the very Gift. In Jesus we are given our God and all that God is and has. This is the basis of our every hope and of a profound inner peace of heart. St. Paul tries to picture for us how faith in Jesus and hope in God through Jesus work; the Divine Love reflected and lived out by Jesus precisely as a human being shows us our vocation and how easy God makes it for us to live it out. Not only is God the supreme Giver but God is the supreme Gift and wants us to make ourselves gifts.

"I believe in the Holy Spirit." God is the greatest and first Giver and in Jesus we learn that God is the greatest and final Gift but to receive a gift the giver has to actually give it. The Holy Spirit is God's giving. In the Spirit God gave the Gift of Jesus. In the Spirit God gave Jesus the gift of being our Savior, as we have celebrated in the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism by John. Jesus responded by giving himself to God in every circumstance, as we learn from the story of his temptation in the wilderness. He completed that gift on the Cross and God showed how this enables the completion of the gift of life to us. We celebrated that at Easter in our joy at Christ's resurrection. Our life is love because it is giving like Jesus.

It is not enough to profess faith in the Triune God. We must live what we believe. We must become givers, our living must become giving and we must give ourselves wholly. We begin in this way to live Trinitarian life, which is Trinitarian love. This Sunday's readings are meant to help us see this happening in us and in all we do. This is our salvation taking place. It is a lived, experienced union with our God. The unity of the Three Persons in the Godhead is a unity that is being realized in us and in all our relationships and works. That is what lived community is all about.

The Transforming Worship of the Triune God

A reflection taken from a poem by St. Gregory Nazianzen

To speak of the Godhead is like crossing the ocean on a raft or flying to the stars with earthly wings. Even heavenly beings are unable to speak of God and the government of the universe. But you Lord can enlighten my mind and loosen my tongue. Spirit of God, I will sound the trumpet of truth as you empower me. United with God in you let me rejoice with all my heart!

There is one eternal God, uncaused and uncircumscribed by any being existing before him or yet to be. God is infinite and all time is in God's hands. God is the mighty Father of one mighty and noble Son. In no way does the birth of this Son resemble human birth. God is Spirit. The Word of God is a Divine Person but not another God. The Son is the living seal of the Father, the only Son of the only God. The Son is equal to the Father; the Son is the creator and ruler of the world and is the Father's power and wisdom. So let us praise the Son first of all, venerating the blood that expiated our sin.

The Son lost nothing of his divinity when he saved me. Like a good physician he stopped to my festering wounds. He was a mortal man but was also God. The Son made himself one of the race of David yet was creator of Adam, David's father. The Son who had no body clothed himself with flesh. He had a mother, but she was a virgin. He is without limits but tied himself to us by the cords of our humanity. He was victim and high priest and yet was God. He offered up his blood and cleansed the whole world; he was lifted up on the cross, though it was actually sin which was nailed to it. He became as one among the dead and yet rose from the dead, raising as well many who had died before him. On the one hand, there was the poverty of his humanity. On the other and there were the riches of his divinity. Don't let what is human in the Son permit you to detract from what is divine. For the sake of the divine hold in the greatest honor the humanity which he took upon himself for love of you.

My soul, why do you hold back? Sing praise to the Holy Spirit lest your words seem to tear asunder what is not separated by its nature. Let us tremble before the Great Spirit who is God and through whom we have come to know God. The Spirit transforms us into God. The Spirit is the omnipotent bestower of many gifts and the giver of life in heaven and on earth. The Spirit is the divine strength, proceeding from the Father. The Spirit is not the Son, but shares equally in the glory of the one Godhead. In the One God there are three pulsations that move the world. Through them I became a new and different person when I came out of the baptismal font, where my death was buried, and came into light. I was restored to life from the dead. If God cleansed me so completely then I must worship him with my whole being. In praising I will be transformed from glory into glory until I am totally like God. O Spirit within me, let your power fill me always with praise!

The Backbone of the Life of Faith

A reflection developed from a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

The backbone of the spiritual life consists in four virtues—perseverance and responsibility, love and compassionate mercy. We have all heard the saying: “You only have one chance to make a good first impression”. What is true in the life of this world is not true where the life of the spirit is concerned. We don’t have to make a good impression on God but are called to let God make a deep and everlasting impression on us. Remembering those who have gone before us we recall the impressions they made on us and how those impressions changed as God’s grace formed them more and more deeply. We know that what God did for them God is doing for us.

From a worldly perspective appearances can be deceiving—graciousness can be superficial and one’s words may have little to do with one’s heart and one’s true values. We also know that Jesus had harsh words for hypocrites—persons who only act the part of one who loves God while actually loving themselves first of all. Yet if we act sincerely won’t we simply display the many aspects of our selves that are anything but pleasing, even to ourselves? In reply Jesus invites us to bring our true selves to him and let him heal us. We can’t be healed if we don’t let our physician see our real state. Those we remember today spent a lifetime letting Jesus see and heal their spiritual illnesses. We need to follow in their footsteps.

Following those who have gone before us with perseverance and responsibility lets God’s Spirit breath into us the foundations of the new person we are becoming in Christ. We come to God like gains of wheat not yet freed from their husk. Threshing, at least for human grains of wheat, is not pleasant. We learn it, as did those who have gone before us, by learning to love those we live with and with whom we form a community of mutual love and support in Christ. That this involves seeing one another’s weaknesses and defects is the reason why our love has to take the form of mercy. As we all have to learn the very difficult task of being merciful to ourselves, we are formed so as to be able to show mercy to others.

The Gospels depict Jesus as a teacher of wisdom and one who uses wisdom—for instance in the form of parables—to teach. God creates all trees good but things happen to them and they seem to be turning out bad. So God transforms us by teaching us to bear good fruit, even though our heart may be less than good and would naturally bear bad fruit. We are being transformed. That is why Jesus has nothing good to say about hypocrites—they hide exactly the weakness and illness that needs to be transformed, unwilling to let them be seen so they can be healed. So many have gone before us along the path of faith and inner healing that remembering them should renew our hope, in God and in God’s power to transform us. They show us that we can let our God clothe us in a new person, created in love and able to show mercy to others who are human and only too human to begin with. What God did in them, and is perhaps still doing in them, God is doing in us. Let us live in hope and trust.

The Life of Transforming Prayer

A reflection developed from a text by the Venerable Bede

After the Lord's Ascension we are told that the disciples persevered in prayer, and that they prayed as a community. Without their realizing it, God was preparing them for the coming of the Holy Spirit. God prepares us in the same way. God wishes to proclaim to the whole world the coming of the Holy Spirit and so the glory of the indivisible Trinity, made visible in prayer and in works of mercy. The disciples received the Spirit while praying. God sends us the Spirit as we pray together.

It is not easy to open one's heart and mind to the Spirit unless one raises them from merely worldly matters and concentrates on the things of God. This is something we need to do many times a day. Scripture tells us, for example, that Daniel bent his knees and prayed to God three times a day. The Church interprets this as meaning we should pray at the third, the sixth and the ninth hour of each day. It does this because these hours remind us of the way God works our salvation and transformation. It was at the third hour that the Holy Spirit was sent. It was at the sixth hour that our Lord was nailed to the Cross. It was at the ninth hour that our Lord yielded up his spirit and breathed the marvelous words: "It is accomplished!"

We have the words of a prophet to tell us: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh". God "pours out" the Spirit lavishly, as the words themselves intimate. The grace of the Holy Spirit is not granted simply to individuals—as to prophets or priests as individuals. The Spirit is poured out lavishly to everyone in every place—regardless of sex or of state in life or of social position. In effect, all are made prophets because all are filled with a new hope in God and proclaim that to all God puts in their paths.

A prophecy also reminds us of what God intends: "I will do prodigies in the heavens above and signs on the earth". When the Lord was born a new star appeared in heaven. People believed that what happens in the heavens indicates what God is working among us and so the new hope for the whole world was indicated by the appearance of a star never before seen. Likewise, when the Lord ascended the Cross the heavens were clothed in darkness to indicate that this new hope was being rejected. When the Lord died the earth trembled violently and tombs were broken open and the bodies of many holy ones were given new life out of death. These are all symbols of what God is doing and wants to do in and for us. The new persons we are becoming will appear as prodigies to those who only knew us as we once were.

The Church likes to remind us of God's working in us through the Holy Spirit by telling us that we are saved through blood and through fire and through a steamy vapor. The Blood is that of the Lord, which came from his side when he was pierced by the soldier's lance. The fire is the Holy Spirit. The steamy vapor represents our tears, not only of repentance but of merciful compunction. The heat of the Spirit makes our prayer fruitful of transformation, not only for us individually but for those with whom we live.

Renewing Trinitarian Life within Us

A reflection developed from a text by Didymus the Blind

In the Godhead there are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We recently celebrated the coming of the Spirit, and so the renewal in baptism of the gift of divine life. The Spirit found us in a state of deformity and has begun to restore in us the beauty we received as God's creation-gift. The Spirit fills us with grace and leaves no room in us for anything that is unworthy of God or gets in the way of our returning God's love whole heartedly. The Spirit frees us from sin and death and changes us from merely earthly people into spiritual people and sharers in Divine Glory. We are children and heirs of God and we bear the likeness of the Son. We are Jesus' brothers and sisters and are destined to reign with him and share his glory. In place of earth, the Spirit opens heaven to us and gladly brings us into paradise. The Spirit gives us an honor even greater than that of the angels.

As human beings we are conceived twice. We were conceived as human beings first but are reconceived by the Spirit a second time. As Scripture says, "To all who received him, who believed in his name, Jesus gave power to become children of God. Such are born not by natural descent nor by fleshly desire nor by the will of a human being but from God." All who believe in Christ receive the power to become children of God. What does that mean? It means they receive the love of God through the Spirit so that they share the life of the Triune God by loving as the Father in the Spirit love the Son.

This is salvation. This is a mystery hidden for ages but revealed to us in the Son. We must keep Jesus' words in mind: "I give you this solemn warning; without being born of water and the Spirit no one can enter the Kingdom of God." This requires an inner rebirth. Visibly, through the ministry of a priest, the baptismal font gives a symbolic birth to us. But invisibly the Spirit of God baptizes each of us into himself and gives us a new birth to life in God.

Speaking quite literally, John the Baptist said: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." We are only vessels of clay. We have to be cleaned a first time in water and then be cleansed by a spiritual fire as clay vessels are "fired" in a kiln. We need to be hardened by spiritual fire so that we will give in to no temptation. That is what the Holy Spirit does for us and for our faith. We were washed in baptism and now have to be melted down so we can be recast. The Spirit melts us so we can be reborn in the likeness of the Son-make-human and will become a new person. This person is capable of living the life-that-is-love of the Divine Life. We celebrate the indwelling of Father and Son and Spirit in us by living their love. It is the love shown to us in and by Jesus Christ. The goal is to renew and strengthen the Divine way of loving as it manifests itself through imitating Jesus.

The Power of a Christian Community

Inspired by a text of the Venerable Bede

In his *History of the English Church & People* the Venerable Bede tells us that St. Augustine of Canterbury came to the Saxon kingdoms of England accompanied by an entire monastic community. There were already Christians and churches in parts of England—for instance the king of the south Saxons has a Christian wife who had as her chaplain a bishop. When St. Augustine's mission was allowed to settle in this part of England they took over the local parish church as their monastic church. What was new about this mission was that the missionaries were a community.

Bede tells us that it was the lifestyle, the fervor and the joy with which the monks lived their Christian life that drew people to accept the faith from them. Eventually, it drew the king, Ethelbert by name, to accept baptism and give the Christian church a kind of official status. This brought it to the favorable attention of many more people than could be contacted or touched by individual missionaries. Thus it was the witness of Christian community living that proved to be the key to opening the hearts of the English people to conversion.

We are told a host of details about the beginnings of Augustine's mission, the gist of which is that Christianity was not feared—because of the Christians already living in England, but was treated with great caution because of attachment to ancestral ways and customs and because of fear of magic. The promises made in the name of Jesus were seen to be attractive but there was fear of the effects if the old ways were left behind. These ways shaped the community living of England's people. So it was not surprising that what made Christian faith attractive was the witness given by a properly Christian way of living in community.

A way of life which grew out of mutual love and support, and which embodied a hope enabling people to deal calmly and successfully with life challenges, drew the Saxon peoples of England to Christ. Bede was himself a monk and so was most interested in pointing out the importance of monastic living as a form of missionary outreach—one which paradoxically didn't require that one leave the monastery. The life lived in the monastery drew people to it and they received the unspoken message of salvation in Christ.

The Holy Spirit enabled Augustine's monks to live Trinitarian love and show forth an example of peace. The same Spirit has been poured into our hearts. Augustine was a bishop and he brought priests with him. But those who made his missionary endeavor effective, humanly speaking, were neither bishops nor priests but ordinary lay persons, living the Christian life and Gospel in the monastic way. They simply allowed all to observe them and their way of relating to one another. Bede intended this as a message for the people and monks of his time. What held in Augustine's time, or Bede's, can be true in ours. We have the same Spirit which lived in them. By living our monastic life with fervor and in the Spirit's love we allow ourselves to be instruments drawing others to Christ and to live the Trinitarian life of love in the way shown us by Jesus.

Praying to Mary as our Mother

Taken from a text by St. Pope John Paul II

O Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. It is with joy and wonder that we seek to make your Magnificat our very own hymn. We want to join in your hymn of thankfulness and do so with love. With you we give thanks to our God, whose mercy is from generation to generation. We thank God for the exalted vocation and the many forms of mission entrusted to us as believers in God and in your Son. God has called each of us by name, even as God called you. We are called to live in the same communion of love and holiness as your Son and to be one in the great family of God's children.

God has sent us forth to shine with the light of Christ. God has sent us to communicate the fire of the Spirit to every corner of our society and world and to do it through a life inspired by the Gospel. O Virgin of the Magnificat, fill our hearts with gratitude and enthusiasm for our vocation and mission. You were the "handmaiden" of the Lord with humility and magnanimity. Give us your unreserved willingness to serve as God directs us and to do it all for the salvation of the world.

Open our hearts to the great anticipation which is our hope for the Kingdom of God. Help us to proclaim the Gospel to the whole of creation. Your mother's heart is always mindful of the dangers and evils which threaten to overpower so many of us, men and women alike. At the same time your heart notices the many initiatives people undertake on behalf of what is good. You notice our deep yearning for true, God-centered values, and for the progress that is achieved only by bringing forth the abundant fruits that are salvation.

O Virgin filled with courage, let your spiritual strength and trust in God inspire us. Teach us how to overcome all the obstacles we encounter in accomplishing our mission. Teach us to treat the affairs of the world with a real sense of Christian responsibility and joyful hope for the coming of God's Kingdom. Help us long ever more for a new Heaven and a new earth.

You were joined in prayer with the apostles and disciples in the Cenacle, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. Implore the Spirit's presence in a new outpouring on all the faithful, so that all might more fully respond to our vocation and mission. We are branches of the true vine and called to bear much fruit for the life of the world. O Virgin Mother, guide and sustain us so that we might always live as true children of the Church of your Son. Enable us to do our part in helping establish on earth the civilization of truth and love as God wills this. We make this prayer seeking only our God's glory. Amen.