



Gospel Mt 28:16-20

The eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up to and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

Reflection

The Easter season celebrates some of the most important events and beliefs in Christian tradition. In the last seven weeks, we have remembered Jesus' Last Supper with his friends (regarded as the institution or establishment of the Eucharist); Jesus' death on the cross; the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday; the appearances of the Risen Lord to his disciples; the Ascension into heaven; and finally, the Holy Spirit filling the disciples at Pentecost. They are events that have shaped Christian belief for nearly 2,000 years. They provide the basis of beliefs and teachings such as: Christ present in the Eucharist; the resurrection of Jesus and the hope of resurrection for all people; the divinity of Jesus; and the ongoing action of the Holy Spirit in the world. The period of Easter-Pentecost celebrates these truly momentous events, beliefs and teachings.

Almost to round off this extraordinary focus on Christian beliefs and teachings, the Church this week celebrates the central doctrine of Christian faith: the Trinity. The belief in the Trinity is the belief that there are three 'persons' in the one Godhead: Father; Son; and Holy Spirit. The understanding and articulation of this doctrine occurred over time and was not until well after the writing of the gospels and other New Testament letters. Consequently, there are no specific scriptural passages that identify explicitly the doctrine of the Trinity. This week's gospel passage, the commissioning of the disciples from the Gospel of Matthew is perhaps the closest any New Testament writer comes to an expression of the Trinity when Jesus instructs the disciples to baptise 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'.

Historical Context

I believe

The word 'Trinity' does not appear anywhere in the New Testament although one can certainly see the beginnings of ideas about a Trinitarian God. It was not until 325, at the Council of Nicea, that the doctrine of the trinity was established as being orthodox teaching. This council sought to officially define the relationship between the Father and the Son as a response to the arguments of Arius (later known as Arian heresy). The statement of beliefs developed by this council in 325 is the Creed (credo - I believe) that is used in Catholic churches around the world today.

Living the Gospel

The Sign of the Cross

Jesus' instruction that the disciples go out to all the nations and baptise them 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' is an instruction that is still being carried on today. Those precise words are used by the priest at every baptism. They are also the words used in the sign of the cross - whether that is a personal, private blessing of oneself or a blessing of a group as in the introductory and dismissal rites as part of a Eucharistic celebration. When we make the sign of the cross we use the words of Jesus.

- Q. *Why might non-Christians find the idea of 'Trinity' a difficult concept?*
- Q. *What consequences would follow if we did not believe that Jesus was 'God from God'?*
- Q. *What image of Trinity do you find helpful?*
- Q. *How does the concept of Trinity help explain the different experiences of God throughout time?*
- Q. *Do you think that most Christian people understand the teaching on Trinity?*