

THE EMMAUS SERIES

Trinity Sunday, Year A

Exodus 34: 4-7, 8-9

2 Corinthians 13: 11-13

John 3: 16-18

God sent his Son, that through him the world might be saved

In each of us there are personal depths, mysterious depths that others can know only if we choose to make them our friends. We should not be surprised, that in the boundless life of our God there is a mystery of overflowing life that is far beyond our complete comprehension. Yet – and here we are touching the very heart of our Christian faith, and its greatness – this mystery of personal life reaches out to us, and invites us into its friendship.

We humans share the mystery of our personhood with others by expressing who we are in our interaction with them. And so it has been with the divine self-disclosure, or revelation. From the first, the God of our faith tradition has reached out to humanity with an astounding generosity that was very different from what was expected from the remote and fearful gods the peoples of the world had set up for themselves: Israel's God was the champion of the oppressed, a God whose self-giving was expressed in a covenant relationship. Our reading from the Book of Exodus gives a moving expression to the deep lessons this covenant relationship brought to those who were open to a meeting with the God who had made them his own: 'a God of tenderness, and compassion, slow to anger, and rich in kindness and faithfulness'.

Great as these lessons were, however, they were only a prelude and foreshadowing of the interaction that would give an ultimate expression to the personal life of God – when 'the Word became flesh, and we saw the glory that he has as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth' (Jn 1:14). Today's reading from John's gospel reiterates this truth: 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son'. Now the mystery of God's generous love has its full expression. The love of the Son, as he gives himself 'that the world might be saved', is the expression of the love of the Father himself – expressed in this text in an echo of Abraham's anguish, when he was told, 'Take your son, your only son; you are to offer him as a burnt offering' (Gen 22:2). In this expression of divine compassion, the astounding superabundance of life in a Trinity of Persons finds expression; and gives us a sharing in its friendship, as 'the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us' (Rom 5:5). (Today's gospel reading is noteworthy for its reference to 'the world'. Usually, in John's gospel, 'the world' refers to humanity's project when it is alienated from God [cf. Jn 15:19]; and God's love towards the disciples of Jesus is what is stressed. In this text, however, 'the world' too is the object of God's saving love.)

Paul's benediction at the end of his second letter to the Corinthians is a remarkable summary of this sharing in the Trinitarian life. It is God's 'Grace' – the absolutely unmerited generosity that has shaped all God's dealings from the beginning – that now finds an ultimate expression in all that 'the Lord Jesus Christ' has done. And what the Saviour has done is the revelation of 'the love of God (the Father)', a love that gathers us into a 'fellowship' that is united in the gifts of 'the Holy Spirit'. These words of the text and its reference to 'a holy kiss' probably echo the liturgies of Paul's communities. It is especially in a faith-filled liturgy that believers experience their sharing in the fellowship of the Trinitarian life.

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