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# The Blessed Trinity and Redemptive Love

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## **The Blessed Trinity and Redemptive Love**

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## **Trinity Sunday**

Sunday Readings for June 15, 2014 for Cycle A:

Ex 34:4-9; Dn 3:52-56; 2 Cor 13:11-13; Jn 3:16-18

### **THE BLESSED TRINITY AND REDEMPTIVE LOVE**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

Probably our parents chose our names with great care, giving us a patron saint or two, possibly honoring a favorite member of the family. At some point we may have learned the meaning of our names, and that should have given us inspiration, like investigating the life of our patron. The ancient Hebrews attached great significance to names, because they revealed the hope and expectation of parents for each child. When Moses first encountered the God of his ancestors in the burning bush, receiving the commission to rescue the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, he naturally asked to know the divine Name (Ex 3:1-14). The answer was surprising: "I am who am", revealing something profound about God but not allowing people the familiarity that might be the basis for cheap manipulation. Although philosophers may well reflect on the Mystery of Being, probably the Name meant to the ancient Israelites that God was present with them. This was the sacred Name which, long before the time of Jesus, was pronounced only once a year by the high priest in the Holy of Holies. Scholars guess that it was pronounced "Yahweh" (several hundred years ago, those ignorant of spoken Hebrew conjectured "Jehovah") but, sensitive to the Jewish practice, the title "Lord" should be substituted for this inexpressible Name.

After the Israelites were brought to Mount Sinai in the wilderness, God revealed the privileges and responsibilities of the Covenant to them. While Moses communed with God on the mountain top, the people fell into idolatry, worshiping a calf made from their golden ornaments. Because Moses broke the tables of the Decalogue in his frustration, he had to return for a second edition. The brief text taken for our Sunday reading centers on the full revelation to Moses of the meaning of the special Name of God. "The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity... (Ex 34:6). This is a magnificent expression of the mystery of God. The Rabbis counted thirteen attributes of God in this passage and John learned, perhaps from Jesus himself, that these attributes that reveal the meaning of the divine Name can be summarized in the statement "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

The Gospel text, again to be placed in its context, follows the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus revealed that, to be worthy of sharing in God's kingdom, people had to be born from above (not merely "again", which is the other meaning of the Greek word) of water and the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5-8). "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert (Nm 21:9) so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:14-15). The single Greek verb rendered as "lifted up" includes the humiliation of the Cross and the exaltation of the Resurrection; together they constitute the "hour" of Jesus. The phrase "eternal life" becomes the expression that replaces "kingdom of God" in John's writings. This new life from above is experienced by the faithful now and, if they persevere, blossoms into an eternal communion with the living God.

Our Gospel reading begins with the next sentence, a favorite of Christians everywhere. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Moses knew that God loved his people enough to rescue them from servitude and to forgive their sins. Now God's mercy, forgiveness and patience are revealed anew in the mission of his only Son. The Father gave him up to death so that all humanity might experience the marvels of divine love and goodness.

Just as Israel had to set aside idolatry to serve the one God in freedom, so all who accept the gift of faith and new life must purify themselves from the subtle forms of idolatry and selfishness that ruin so many lives in our world. What are the goals for which we strive? Are they consistent with commitment to God? Love is gracious and merciful, but divine love is demanding: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34-35).