



# Trinity Sunday

2009

**For us, baptized perhaps as children, this gospel can serve to remind us not only of the awesome power of that act itself, but also of the awesome love of Father, Son and Spirit into which we are continually invited.**

The last time the disciples had been to *"the mountain"* in Galilee - a mountain not named in the text, but certainly bearing echoes not only of the Sermon on the Mount and Tabor but also of the Sinai of Moses or the Horeb of Elijah - they'd been the Twelve. But now, Matthew points out that they are only the *"Eleven"* - survivors of their own lack of faith, something which rumbles into view again as they see Jesus : *"they worshiped, but they doubted."* It's an interesting way to begin this last story - on the one hand, reverberations of theophany, and on the other, this very human mixture of love and doubt. With their own eyes they see the risen Jesus, but in their own hearts, there is conflict. Doubt had won once before ; now it looks as if it might win again. It's familiar, after all - quite unlike a man risen from the dead !



But Jesus is not the *"Good Shepherd"* for nothing : knowing his sheep, he finds a way to strengthen them, to help them to accept the mission he's about to give them. And so, instead of waiting for them to come to him, he *"approaches"* them. Meeting these eleven nervous, hopeful men where they are, he shows that he can be with them even there, in the midst of their doubt and fear. He stands among them, as he has so often done before, to tell them three important things. First, he announces that he has been given *"universal power"* and *"therefore"* has the power to send them out. As he says this, we can remember yet another *"high mountain"* and also the *"pinnacle of the Temple"* where Satan had tempted him long ago with what looked like righteous power ; refusing, he had chosen instead to share ordinary life, to walk the long dusty roads that eventually led him up the mountain of Calvary. He had emptied himself of all power, refusing to *"grasp"* at it (Phil 2:6) ; now it has been returned by the Father.

After this, he commands these utterly ordinary Jewish men to go out to *"all nations"* and accomplish a mighty task : make gentiles *"disciples"* by baptizing them *"in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."* What could that mean except that pagans would become like themselves - part of the adopted children of God of whom Paul speaks in his Letter to the Romans. And this would happen through this baptism into God - *"Father, Son and Holy Spirit."* How mind-blowing ! As they hear these simple, mysterious, terrifying words, the Eleven might well be feeling all the doubt of a few minutes earlier boiling up again. But remember : they're not just standing on some random hillside in Galilee. No, they're *"on the mountain,"* and Jesus has not finished giving his message. When he says : *"Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age,"* it is to remind them that he is Emmanuel - *"God with us,"* the Promise incarnate. The *"Great Commission"* is not just some kind of big project that he sets them while he disappears into the clouds. Rather, it is invitation to participate in the life of God - to become one with God — and to make that invitation available to all.

For us, baptized perhaps as children, this gospel can serve to remind us not only of the awesome power of that act itself, but also of the awesome love of Father, Son and Spirit into which we are continually

invited. If we feel hesitant before this invitation, that's probably a healthy sign ! But at the same time, let's remember that we're standing with the Eleven and all those who've preceded us, not on some ordinary hillside, but "*on the mountain.*" Jesus is there, and, as Paul says, so too is the "*Spirit itself, bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*" What more could we desire ?

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