

From the May 4, 2010 Issue

Experience the Gospel, Don't Just Observe Days

In May, the Church celebrates three significant days that are wholly connected to our Adoption into the Life of the Trinity in Jesus. I simply want to remind you that rather than being days in which we simply celebrate and expound upon doctrine, these celebrations are actually opportune moments in which we experience the Father, Son and Spirit with each other and within Creation as the Church!

Having grown up in a somewhat relational but primarily legalistic denomination early on, it was easier and more habitual for me to think of the Celebration of Church Feasts Days as requirements that please God (and that were to be observed whether I liked them or not!) They were also seen as ways to please God, rather than understanding that in Jesus, the Son of God made Man, God the Trinity was already fully pleased with me! In other words, if I didn't keep or observe the required days, there would surely be some kind of "hell to pay", (specifically, no rain would fall on my crops in the future, even though I didn't want to be a farmer!) No green thumb here, and still only a brown one! Ha-Ha!

I never remember those exact words of there being "hell to pay", but I do remember feeling that way (especially the time I missed observing a day because of a flat tire which surely had come because of a sin I had committed earlier that week!) Because of this cultural background, it is easier for me to think of Church's Celebrations primarily as days that reinforce doctrine pointing more toward my future than as an actual and present experience of Life in the Trinity.

But Thank God the Father, Son and Spirit for the Truth of the Gospel! Getting clarity on the Good News of my (and all of Humanity's!) Adoption, in Jesus Christ, into the Life of the Trinity 2000 years ago, helps me see, discover and experience the triune God Himself on those days in a way that is more meaningful and relational. The three specific days I am speaking about celebrating in May are Ascension Sunday, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday.

The first celebration day to experience relationally in May, Ascension Sunday, occurs on Sunday, May 16. The very name of this celebration seems to hint more towards a fact than a relationship, doesn't it? It seems to speak mainly of Jesus' getting out of here, ascending into the sky, and separating Himself from us for a little while in Heaven until it is time for his Second Coming (Acts 1:1-11.) While there is some truth in that thinking, it is hardly the most significant thing and it most certainly does not emphasize the most point – that of being able to experience the Trinity NOW!

As Richard Vincent states so clearly and accurately in his article "Where's Jesus? The Significance of the Ascension":

The point in the Acts of the Apostles is not that the risen Jesus is "somewhere in a galaxy, far, far away" but that the risen Jesus continues to work on this earth in the church and through the Spirit. Christians believed that the risen Jesus who dwelt in the immediate presence of God was - because of this - everywhere accessible. Gerrit Scott Dawson summarizes their belief well: "The ascended Lord is not everywhere ... but he is everywhere accessible."

Heaven relates to earth tangentially so that the one who is in heaven can be present simultaneously anywhere and

everywhere on earth: the ascension therefore means that Jesus is available, accessible, without people having to travel to a particular spot on the earth to find him.

The risen Jesus dwells in the immediate presence of God and both transcends and (precisely because he transcends) embraces our present experience. This truth is at the heart of the "up" language used to describe the ascension. It is a metaphorical way to speak of that which is above and beyond us, that is, that transcends us: "Heaven is higher than we, not lower. It is beyond us, not beneath us. It is without, not within; more than our capacity to hold, not less. Heaven transcends us as a greater, truer, more splendid reality."

Jesus transcends and thus embraces all reality. Again, in the words of Dawson, "The ascended Lord is not everywhere ... but he is everywhere accessible."

Amen to that! Can't you see and experience the significant difference between the observance of a day versus the reality of being able to experience Jesus everywhere and anywhere because of his immediate God/Human presence before his Father, being shared with us presently in the Holy Spirit? So Ascension is actually more like the ascension and heightened sense of relationship between two lovers in bed than it is the idea of being separated by obstacles of height! Wowsa! Huge difference in word picture too, huh?! Ha-Ha!

The same goes for the coming of the Holy Spirit and Celebrating Him on Sunday, May 23! (Acts 2) This isn't primarily a day of waiting for the Spirit to come, as much as it is the reality of the fact that THE Holy Spirit of the Trinity has already come to "all flesh" – Acts 2:17 – and that He is as Personal, Available, Within-us, Hospitable, Kind, Confrontational, Undomesticated and as Loving toward all of humanity as the Father and the Son are!

Regarding Trinity Sunday, Celebrated on Sunday, May 30th, the Trinity is not the clichéd "riddle wrapped up inside a puzzle and buried in an enigma" (as Winston Churchill spoke about Russia: <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/31000.html>) Nor is Trinity Sunday primarily the observance of a day so important that "If you don't believe in the Trinity, you will lose your soul. If you try to understand the Trinity you will lose your mind." (*Rediscovering the Trinity in the Local Congregation*, pg. 1, Thomas Jenkins.) Trinity Sunday is simply, and hugely, a Celebration and experience of the Triune God and His specially called-out ones in the Truth of humanity's actual adoption and significant place in the Life of the Triune God in Jesus!!

So the questions aren't, "Where exactly is Jesus?", or "When exactly is Jesus coming again?" The questions are "How will I experience my present Adoption into the Life of God the Trinity along with others while celebrating these days, and, in what way am I uniquely gifted in the Holy Spirit to participate in the Life of God the Father, Son and Spirit? I can't wait to gather with other believers and confirm my special place in the Fellowship and Relational Creativity of this One and only Triune God!!!

~ Timothy J. Brassell