

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2005
(Trinity Sunday)
(Exod 34:4b-6, 8-9; Dan 3; 2 Cor 13:11-13; John 3:16-18)

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Formulating a coherent exposition relating today's readings to the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity seems to me to be about as difficult as trying to understand the Trinity itself! The mystery of God was already perceived in certain Jewish circles before the time of Jesus as allowing for complexity, and for the coexistence with the one God of various manifestations of that God which were thought to be quasi-separate entities, and also allowing for the existence of intermediary redeemer figures. Specifically, already in the Priestly and Deuteronomic schools God was often not spoken of directly, but as "Glory" (Ezek 1:28; 3:12; 8:4, etc.) and "Name" (Deut 26:2; 1 Kgs 8:16, 20, 27, etc.). There was much preparation in both Palestinian and Greek Judaism for giving the creative Word of God an existence distinct from God himself (see, e.g., Prov 8:22-31, regarding Wisdom, which was also personified). The priest Melchizedek (Gen 14:17-20; Ps 110; Heb 7) took on eternal redeemer features among the Essenes famous for the Dead Sea Scrolls. The anointed (messiah) king was thought of as God's son (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7). And Yahweh's Holy Spirit could be sent to recreate (Ps 104:30; Ezek 37:5; the Spirit is individually addressed in 37:9-10), could be grieved, Isa 63:10), and so forth.

The point is that the Triune nature of the one God of Jews and Christians was made manifest to the earliest Church (Paul provides us with our earliest writings, even before the gospels, but see already the baptismal formula in Matt 28:19). Jesus is God's creative Word—God's externalizing of himself to creation, so to speak—made flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14) as Yahweh's Glory did of old, Exod 40:34. The Spirit brings us into communion with God and with ourselves, as reflected in Paul's farewell prayer in his letter today, and in the first reading, where the glorious God (indicated by the cloud, Exod 40:34) and his Name are asked to "come along in our company." And in John's gospel, it is the Trinity which dwells in us, John 14:15-17, 23-26, etc.