

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY – YEAR A

Second Reading 2 Corinthians 13: 11–13

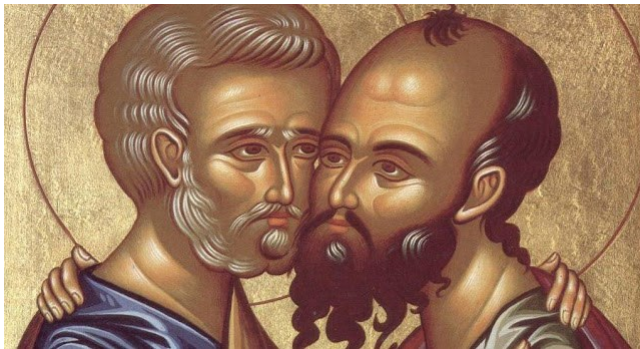
Paul wrote his Second Letter to the Corinthians from Macedonia, after leaving Ephesus, probably in the autumn of 57AD. It is one of the most personal of all his letters and gives us an insight into Paul the man. His integrity has been attacked and Paul is hurt by the dissensions of the young Church in Corinth. Now he needs to reassert his authority.

The passage we are reading today constitutes the final lines of his Letter: its conclusion and final blessing.

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to live in peace, greeting each other with a kiss, the common way of greeting family members. Christians should be like brothers and sisters in their relationships. The kiss was also possibly a gesture used in liturgies and the usual way that rabbis greeted one another.

The 'Saints' mentioned here are the members of other Churches in Macedonia, and perhaps also the members of the Jerusalem community who were at the centre of the Church. Paul also often refers to other Christians as 'Saints'.

The final sentence was used by the early Church Councils (such as Nicea) to exemplify the theology of the Trinity, but had no such connotation when St Paul himself wrote it. Grace, Love, and Fellowship, are nevertheless the core qualities of a model Christian community.



'Greet one another with the holy kiss'

Gospel John 3: 16–18

'During the first centuries the Church sought to clarify her Trinitarian faith, both to deepen her own understanding of the faith and to defend it against the errors that were deforming it.' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §250) This clarification was the work of the early Councils, in particular Nicaea and Constantinople, in the fourth century AD.

Jesus speaks to Nicodemus

Nicodemus, a common name of the time, is only found in St John's Gospel. He is a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, a council of 23 judges appointed in every city.

Today's Gospel is part of a longer story where Jesus engages and teaches Nicodemus in a dialogue typical of John's Gospel (compare the woman at the well – Third Sunday in Lent, Year A). These dialogues enable Jesus (or St John himself at times), to explain a misunderstanding and develop further the true spiritual meaning of his words.

God loved the world so much

This verse is possibly one of the best known and loved in the Bible.

In Jesus we have the supreme example of God's love. We are affected and changed by it. We are to love, because God loved us first (1 John 4: 19).

St John's audience, towards the end of the first century, lived in fear of the Romans and of traditional Jews. They were in danger of developing a 'them and us' mentality. St John tells them that God's love is for the whole world and that Jesus is the instrument to bring people back to God.

Contrasts and symbols

* Light and darkness

Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night. In him we can see all seekers, at first in darkness but then emerging into the light (19: 39). This contrast is a favourite of St John. People who do not know God's love are in darkness. In Jesus, they find light, faithfulness, love.

* To condemn and to save

Salvation is offered to us through Jesus because of God's love for us. Condemnation is not the purpose of the Incarnation. We condemn ourselves by turning away from God, choosing to do our own thing, being self-reliant – as, for example, Adam did – and by rejecting his Son.

* To believe or not to believe in the name of Jesus

Another word for 'to believe' might be 'to place your trust' in God, present to his people through his Son. Our faith is based on a trust relationship with Jesus, the Son of God, and the enormous love between Father and Son – namely, the Spirit.