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Preserve the Unity of the Spirit

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The Secret of God's Plan — Studies in  
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# HOMILETICS

TRINITY XV

SEPTEMBER 6

## *Worship Supplement*

The Invitatories of "A Morning Service"  
(Matins, pp. 78—79)

For the next three Sundays suggestions for preaching will be made from the new setting of the Order of Matins. With the beginning of September a fresh accent could helpfully be made on the values of concentrating on our worshiping through the use of new forms. As a theme for the three Sundays words from the Epistle for the 16th Sunday after Trinity might be chosen (Eph. 3:13, 19). There we pray that we may be "strengthened with might through God's Spirit . . . and that we may be filled with the fullness of God." One way by which this prayer can be answered is for us to open ourselves from time to time to new forms in public worship, as a means to expand and enrich our experience of God's Spirit's presence and power in our lives.

The *Problem* might be approached from our reaction to things new and different in worship. Many of us do not "take" to new forms of worship with enthusiasm. In fact, some of us resist them, both passively and actively. Why? One reason may be that the learning process involves physical effort on our part as well as stretching our mental muscle. And we've been misled as children to assume that all learning must be fun — and that if it isn't fun, something must be wrong with the teacher or with the material being taught. A second reason for our resistance may be that familiar worship materials are a source of security to us. Replacing the familiar with the unfamiliar upsets us, makes us ill at ease, and gives us that uneasy feeling that someone is rocking the boat (which is true) and that the boat may capsize and sink (which is *not* necessarily true).

Let's confront this double resistance we have toward the new and different. First, let's acknowledge that the learning process is not always fun, that it often involves pain. But pain comes in two varieties: the kind that is necessary (for example, filling a cavity in a tooth, vaccinating an arm, and so on) and the kind that is needless (for example, headaches caused by nervous tension, backaches caused by overindulging in a favorite sports activity, and the like). The "pain" involved in assimilating new worship forms is surely of the "necessary" variety.

Second, let's understand that we are prone to confuse what we think is our sense of security with what is in reality our listlessness or laziness. "Rocking the boat" may be exactly what "our ship" needs — in order to get it moving again. And God is pleased with our worship only "when it's moving" — only when it's alive. Variety in form in our public worship helps to assure continuing new life from week to week. All of this reflection on our reaction to forms could be taken to a more significant level in considering the self-centeredness which is exposed in the Gospel for the day (Matt. 6:24-34) and which is condemned in the Epistle (Gal. 5:25—6:10) when it comes into conflict with the needs of our brothers.

The *Power* to concentrate on God rather than self and things, and the power to bear one another's burdens, can be shared in this sermon through the seasonal invitatories proposed for Matins in the *Supplement* (pp. 78 to 79). Our need for God's power is a continuing one, and throughout the year the invitatories remind us of the way God's loving power for change reaches us. The King comes! The Christ is born! Christ has appeared! The Lord is risen indeed! The king ascends to heaven! The Spirit of the Lord fills the world! And finally all of our

growing response is directed toward "the true God, One in Three and Three in One." And that response is, "O come, let us worship Him."

## TRINITY XVI

SEPTEMBER 13

*Worship Supplement*

"O Come, Let Us Sing" (*Venite*, pp. 69—70)

As we struggle to learn and to grow, He who is at work within us is able to accomplish (in our worship, too) far more abundantly than all that we ask or even think possible.

In the *Venite* we challenge one another to "sing to the Lord"—to "make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!" Why? Because He is a great God! our Maker! And because we are His people! Those reasons are solid just as they stand. But another reason for our consistent singing to the Lord is our desire to be more and more *His people*. We who wish to be "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man," who long to be "filled with all the fullness of God," approach that great goal with St. Paul by adding our part of the glory which is "given to God in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages." (Epistle: Eph. 3:13-21)

*Problem:* The new self in us agrees: "It is good to sing to the Lord. Let's do it—with joy!" But the old self in us, still alive and struggling, objects. "What's so great about this God who you say created you? And what's this talk about your being 'His people'?" Listen, man! In this 20th century you have to make it on your own. You don't even know for sure that there is any God up there or out there whom you can praise. If you want to sing, sing the praises of your fellowmen, who are doing magnificently these days without any guidance or help from any 'great God.' Today's doctors are already

transplanting organs from one human being into another; tomorrow they'll be able to extend life indefinitely for all human beings. Today's astronauts have already reached the moon; tomorrow they'll be heading out toward Mars and beyond. There's nothing man can't do if he puts his mind and his money to it!"

*Power:* The new self in us will not put up with such serpent-inspired talk. Its Spirit-inspired rejoinder: "You ask what's so great about our God? I'll tell you. He's the God who has created and who holds together this entire universe which we're just beginning to explore. He's the God who has designed our human bodies in the magnificent manner which we're just beginning to understand. Only under His Lordship and by His mercy do we live on this planet earth and enjoy it. We human beings have already done enough damage to the earth and to ourselves as a result of our futile efforts to play god. I say: Let's wise up and be glad that through His Son's death and resurrection God has forgiven our past—is with us now—and has guaranteed us new life in His presence forever. We believe that because of our baptism we are no longer on our own; we are 'the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.' God Himself opens our lips, enabling us to declare His praises. Now, once again: 'O come . . .' (*Venite . . .*)."

## TRINITY XVII

SEPTEMBER 20

*Worship Supplement*

"We Praise You, O God"  
(*Te Deum Laudamus*, pp. 71—73)

The Epistle (Eph. 4:1-6) urges us to remember how important is the unity among brothers to which the Spirit has called us. If we are to lead a life worthy of the calling to which He has called us, we must know ourselves to be one body and know that we have one God. We must have a right rela-

tionship with God if our lives are really to be right.

"We praise you, O God!" In the *Te Deum* we invite one another to join the apostles, prophets, martyrs, and all our fellow Christians in heaven and on earth to praise the one God, God the Father of us all. Together as one body we praise our one Lord who opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. We celebrate our deliverance from sin. We are already numbered with the saints in glory everlasting. Certainly this divine deliverance gives us cause to celebrate!

*Problem:* We are, however, surrounded by evil in this world. Wars and rumors of wars persist in spite of our prayers for peace. Inflation continues its upward spiral, defying our government's efforts to control it. Racist attitudes among both blacks and whites seem to become worse, the efforts of men of good will notwithstanding. Furthermore, we recognize and confess that we ourselves are part of the problem of the evil in which we find ourselves enmeshed. "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; we have done those things which we ought not to have done."

*Power:* God's good news is most dear to us precisely in these moments of our despair. By His mercy we are His beloved children, secure under His fatherly care at all times. Consequently, as we anchor ourselves to the rock which is Christ, we are able to "regain our cool" in the midst of evil. God's own Holy Spirit inspires us to continue to direct our prayers upward and our actions outward as we strive to restore peace and good will among nations and classes and races. At the same time we are aware that the kingdom of heaven has been opened to us, so that we keep our eyes fixed not only on the here and now, but also on the heavenly goal toward which our lives are moving. Along life's way we are nourished by Jesus Christ Himself, from the table at which He is both our host as well as our food. And by faith we are sure

that when we are transferred from this life to the life of the world to come, we shall be joining the apostles and prophets and martyrs. So we celebrate, singing with thanksgiving: "We praise you, O God. . . ."

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## TRINITY XVIII

SEPTEMBER 27

*Worship Supplement:* In the midst of the experimental use of new structures the congregation considers the total significance of its corporate worship.

*Text:* James 1:19-21 and Psalm 122:1

*Topic:* "The Sounds of the World and the Sounds of the Word"

*Point:* To help the hearer find joy in corporate worship in all its changing structure. Worship is not primarily an escape from the noise and secularity of the world, but a dynamic experience in the changeless Gospel, by which we are propelled out into the world with the echo of the Gospel ("the sound of the Word") sanctifying the noise and clamor of the world ("the sound of the world").

*Textual and Liturgical Contact:*

James 1:19: "Let every man be quick to hear. . . ."

James 1:21: "Receive with meekness the implanted word. . . ."

Psalm 122:1 (cf. Introit and Gradual):  
"I was glad. . . ."

*Problem:* What so easily robs the hearer of joy in corporate worship is that

1. he sees going to church as an escape from the humdrum noise of the world, only to find there "the world" invading the church through new forms and new sounds; such change will not let his churchgoing be an escape; he longs for the comfortable and "peaceful" sameness and solemnity which do little to help him live in the world;

2. he recognizes no connection between the sounds of the world and the sounds of the Word, the "secular" and the "sacred," "loving the Lord with heart, soul, and mind" and "loving neighbor as self"; worse, he does not *live* the connection;
3. he simply does not listen; he does not hear; he turns off the sounds of the Word in worship or in daily life in the world; all he really hears in both is meaningless and depressing noise.

*Textual and Liturgical Contact:*

James 1:19-21: Loveless living with others is a symptom of bad "hearing" and "receiving" of the Word. Context: "doers of the Word, and not hearers only."

**Gospel for Day:** The Pharisees and Sadducees were stymied at the very point at which we too have difficulty: seeing the connection between the "sacred" and the "secular," between Christ as David's Lord and Christ as David's son, between loving God (incompletely viewed as worship, Bible study, prayer, and so on) and loving neighbor (education, job, community involvement, activity in the world, and so on).

**Power:** The Word has been "implanted" in the world through the incarnation of the Son of God, and in the Christian hearer through Baptism. The "sacred" has invaded the "secular" and transformed it. The sounds of the Word and the sounds of the world are in Christ unified and harmonized to make one grand declaration of God's praise. Amid necessary changes in worship structure and deplorable decay in the world's activities, the changeless Christ is Lord of all and sounds out the news that we are His. That Word we joyfully receive with meekness in corporate worship. That Word we joyfully hear echoed in our lives of love in the world.

*Textual and Liturgical Contact:*

James 1:19-21: The "implanted Word" has become part and parcel of our world and of the hearer's total life. Since the "implanting" took place, Word and world, the "sacred" and the "secular," my going to the house of the Lord out of the world and going to the world out of the house of the Lord are unified, for the Lord claims both as His domain of grace and power.

Psalm 122:1: "I was glad," because there I hear the news (the sound) that is dominant in the symphony of life. (These psalm words also shape the Introit and Gradual.)

**Gradual:** The "peace within the walls and prosperity within Thy palaces" is followed by a call upon ALL nations and ALL people to praise the Lord. We hear this universal praise, also in the world, when we hear the Word echoed there. It is there if only we have ears to hear. And we have!

**Recommended Method:** The mutual relationship of the "sounds of the world" and the "sounds of the Word" can be highlighted audibly by use of recorded sounds at places in the proclamation of the sermon, as follows:

**Problem:** Record short segments of sounds of routine daily life which we tend to classify as secular and from which we sometimes seek escape in our practice of religion (for example, jet plane, city traffic, radio announcer advertising a product, machinery, news broadcast, sports announcer at an emotional moment, storm, bird singing). Make up a composite totaling about 30 seconds to play in connection with words about our life in the world.

Record a second composite segment of the same length of "sounds of the Word" (for example, preaching, choir singing, congregation praying, pouring of baptismal water, words of institution, benediction). Play it in

connection with words about going to the house of the Lord as an escape.

*Power:* The same sounds described above can be re-recorded on top of each other in such a way that the world-sounds form a more quiet background to the more dominant Word-sounds. Play this in connection with words about the union of worship with life, the Word echoing and taking charge of our daily lives.

NOTE: Recorded world-sounds can be procured through the use of commercial sound-effects recordings, or through personal first-hand tape recordings. Word-sounds can be selected from recordings of previous worship services.

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#### TRINITY XIX

OCTOBER 4

*Worship Supplement:* The Second of the After Pentecost Offertories (p. 32)

In the Gospel for the day (Matt. 9:1-8) the people "glorified God, who had given such authority to men." It was the healing and forgiving power of the Son of Man that prompted their praises. The Epistle (Eph. 4:17-28) makes very clear that we, who have been healed and forgiven, should get up and walk—walk differently. And this offertory reminds us that it is the Spirit of God who lives in us that enables us to live differently.

All too many of us live "after Trinity" lives. The offertories remind us that our living *should* be "after Pentecost." The words from 1 Cor. 8:6 tell us of the tremendous premises on which our whole existence is built. From God the Father "all things *are*." *We* are, our very existence is, from the Father. Through Jesus Christ "all things *are*." Through Him we exist. True living can only be "in Christ." But it is so easy to hear that all and tuck it away as dogma, something we agree to, rather than *believe*. True *faith* in those tremendous facts would mean that we

would actually move from incident to event in every day in that relationship with God and His Son which is truly "existence."

The offertory verse from 1 Cor. 6:19-20 forces us to get down to cases. And we need help to realize that we are the most serious case. We are flat on our backs in sick bay, thinking we are simply relaxing, massaging ourselves with the Biblical thought that God gives His beloved sleep—and since we are half asleep we are at least half beloved. The seriousness of our case is that we are in terminal illness if we can be satisfied with the unliving life, the "after Trinity" rather than the "after Pentecost" life. Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We have that power, that person, from God—and we should be glorifying God in our bodies as we live through each event and incident in our days.

A doctor goes through the wards "getting down to cases." And each case is down, flat on his back. But the doctor's goal is to get the cases *up*, back on their feet. And that is the Spirit's goal for us. The Gospel works new health in us. The illustration falls apart—talking of the doctor's fee does not improve the health of the patient; but talking of the "price" stirs up new life in Christians. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price." We who came from God—and all too often deliberately go away from God; we who exist only through Jesus Christ—and all too often try to transplant our home-made heart with a personal hand pump into our bodies so that we can "do it myself"; we have been brought back into God's possession by a great price. The Great Physician did the healing, and He did the paying. We are not our own. And the proof of it is in our inner thankful awareness that we are glad we are His!

"So glorify God in your body." That "so" is both a "therefore" and a connection to the "thus" which is spelled out in the day's

Epistle. "Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Today, in this service, we present ourselves with our offerings and these gifts of bread and wine, saying: "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever!"

## TRINITY XX

OCTOBER 11

*Worship Supplement: Hymn 757*  
"O Kingly Love, That Faithfully"

The Epistle for this day seems to suggest that men filled with the Spirit will "address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord" (Eph. 5:15-21). If we hear with seriousness its admonition to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," we should take seriously our task of helping one another by our singing.

The usual approach of the hymn-picker to these aspects of the Epistle is to pick easy hymns, well-known hymns, that a congregation can sing loudly and . . . without thinking. The *Supplement* provides a splendid opportunity to challenge Christians really to sing to one another, really to address one another with words that the Spirit can use to help all of us to "walk circumspectly." The text by Martin H. Franzmann is based on the Gospel for this Sunday (Matt. 22:1-14). It suggests as a *Point* that all of us "Come to the feast, The good and the bad, Come and be glad, Greatest and least, Come to the feast!" The tune by Richard Hillert combines with the words to make this one of the very original offerings of the *Supplement* and one that serves well as a hymn of the week. It is not an easy hymn, and its demands on the singers require that choir and soloist and preacher work together to make it possible for the congregation to sing it, and more — to sing

it to one another. It is set in the hymnal as a hymn for the Festival of the Reformation. The words about "a trumpet none could silence or mistake" make clear the reference to the reforming work. The congregation may find that this hymn will wear well throughout the rest of this month if they are later alerted to the Reformation accent it contains. But for today, let it speak the account of the day's Gospel, and speak it to those who have heard the invitation to the feast today.

It could be helpful to alert the hearers to the sequence of titles applied to the divine love — kingly Love, lavish Love, seeking Love, and finally holy Love and ruthless Love — and then to have the choir or a solo voice sing the hymn, perhaps before and after the reading of the Gospel. Then let the sermon begin with the *Problem* — "man's cool and careless enmity . . . man robed in contempt of thee."

The sermon could then undertake to be the *Power* which will bring all to realize the richness of the feast prepared and to bring all to the feast. "The feast is ready — come to the feast." It is not an invitation to which one can reply, "Oh, must we?" or, "I'll think about it." God only "bid the bidden" over centuries, and chose only that one people to bless. That we are on the list today is an awesome thing. (Don't be "cool" about this, or "careless," and certainly not "contemptuous.") But then — "how lavish the love" — a table ("as bounteous as God's heart") that offers the goodness of God to all mankind. And that Love is even now "seeking, searching." And that Love will accept "the bad and the good on every street." And that Love will accept us all — who are both.

That last note should sound "living and clear" from pulpits that speak still for the Reformation Gospel.

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TRINITY XXI  
THE DAY OF ST. LUKE  
OCTOBER 18

*Worship Supplement:* The Proper Preface of Eucharist I and for Days of Apostles and Evangelists (pp. 42 and 44)

"It is our duty and our delight . . . through Jesus Christ, our Lord, because you did mightily govern and protect your holy Church, which the blessed apostles and evangelists instructed in your divine and saving truth. . . ."

It is through our neglect and to our sorrow that through omission and disuse we have frequently failed to spend time on the days of apostles and evangelists. This is particularly true since the Father mightily governs and protects His holy church today by the lives and ministries of men even as He once did through the instruction by blessed apostles and evangelists.

The preface in the Holy Communion underscores the direction of the day's liturgy. For the day of St. Luke the phrase of the preface and the life of that evangelist witness to a *Point* for each one of us — we should be men for whom our duty is our delight.

We know little of Luke as a physician and yet we can imagine him as one who, because he knew the ultimate compassion of Christ, delighted in his life's duty. Luke had a double sense of duty in life. As an evangelist who was also a physician his concern for men was expressed under the mastery of the perfect man. His feeling for the suffering of mankind and his prescription for their ultimate solution had their source in the agony of the Nazarene. The writer of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* said: "We worship . . . [the] Son of God, but we love the martyrs as disciples and imitators of the Lord, deservedly so because of their unsurpassable devotion to their own king and Teacher." He concludes with the prayer, "May it be also our lot to be their companions and fellow disciples."

We are often forced in life to do things or to be something which we would prefer not to do or to be. The migration from job to job, wife to wife, channel to channel, interest to interest and back again betrays man's dissatisfaction with duty. Our *Problem* is learning how to be delighted with our duty. It is obviously all too frequent that people do not realize their duty or are confused about what God would have them do. But even when we are clear about the task that is set before us, we frequently find it difficult to be delighted with our duty, because all too often what we desire and what our God expects are two different things.

Duty and delight come together in the phrase of the preface, "through Jesus Christ, our Lord." It is by Him, who is the true physician for those who are really ill, that we are brought to that stance in life in which we can "at all times and in all places give thanks to God, holy, Father Almighty." St. Luke probably first heard about this Jesus Christ through St. Paul. (Our imagination might put Paul into the office of Dr. Luke. He is suffering with eye trouble that was really a thorn in the flesh, brought about through a flash of divine light in the Damascus vision. Dr. Luke asks the basic question for his card file: "What was the cause of your eye trouble?" Paul's answer to Luke can be power for us all.)

St. Luke then uncovered the firsthand accounts of the birth and life and death of Jesus Christ for his gospel. As we preach these facts again, we use and share the *Power* which enabled the doctor to delight in the duty of giving thanks and will move us too to delight in all that it is our duty to do.

TRINITY XXII  
OCTOBER 25

*Worship Supplement*

Rubrics for the Minister (p. 25)

"When the minister gives the bread, he shall say, 'The Body of Christ,' and when he gives

the cup, he shall say, 'The Blood of Christ.'"

In a visual age our eyes face the constant problem of confusing the coating with the content. We are often shown only the outer crust and kept from thinking about what the shell once held. The world of advertising is often a Madison Avenue with shoddy, propped-up facades along which we walk in response to the seller's lie seeking for things that are illusory and false.

The crisis is not only commercial. It is a crisis of all sinful mankind. The irony of human vacuity becomes apparent when we see how often men are content to be aware of their body and the things they drape upon it and simply never ask the question whether there is any content. Men frequently are aware that their inner depths are actually very shallow, and they set up defense mechanisms of outward appearance — the dark-brown glass that prevents anyone from seeing how nearly empty is the bottle. In C. S. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces* the central character, Orual, confesses: "I was like water put into a bottle and left in a cellar: utterly motionless, never to be drunk, poured out, spilled or shaken. The days were endless. The very shadows seemed nailed to the ground as if the sun no longer moved."

How can we be filled with all the fullness of God?

We bring what water we have, what water we are, in earthen vessels. Christ speaks the Word, Christ works His work, and wine abounds for the feast. It happened at that first, fresh, fun miracle at Cana, and it happens in every sacramental celebration. What is passed to the moist tongues of men is not simply dry bread. "The minister shall say, 'The body of Christ.'" The wine is more than something to be swallowed and tasted. "The

minister shall say, 'The blood of Christ.'" The words our Lord said as He gave us to eat and to drink are not only verbal coating, but they are content — they are Word. Christ speaks these words. Christ has worked the work God willed Him to do when He offered up His broken body and shed His blood for all the world. With these words which we speak, with this body and blood, Christ works His work anew and new life, forgiveness-life, salvation-life, abounds at the feast.

Here is the special "lip service" of Christ for lives which need filling. Behind the body and the blood, and lifting us up in faith to receive it, is the hand of God. This straightforward emphasis on God's creative activity in the Eucharist is conveyed in the prayer of thanksgiving (*Worship Supplement*, pp. 45 to 47, 60—61, 65—66). The eucharistic prayer prepares the communicant for what is to come by the petitions which it addresses to God.

What words can we say, with lips and lives open, so hungry? We are starved men who must confess before we eat that we are unworthy of food. For this reason the Father gives us the meal for worthless men, the worthy body and blood of His Son. The power of this meal is revealed in the yeast of praise which it raises in our hearts. Because we have the total presence of Christ, we can sing with the psalmist: "How good Yahweh is — only taste and see! Happy the man who takes shelter in him" (*The Jerusalem Bible*). "Too soon we rise, the vessels disappear; The feast, though not the love, is passed and gone. The bread and wine remove, but thou art here." (Hymn 765)

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