

Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost [4th Sunday after Trinity] (A), 15.vi.06
Ss. Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa / Fathers' Day
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Exodus 19:2-8a; Psalm 100; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:23
Holy Eucharist: ELW Spoken Order, 8:30 a.m.; Summer Worship Order + Sacrament of

J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

Then [Jesus] said to His Disciples: "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; therefore ask the LORD of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

--Matthew 9:9

Our Lord shows His first Disciples and us a *participatory* model of Christian discipleship, sending the Twelve from among them out on a mission not for the faint-hearted. Just look at all the action and drama going on in today's Gospel. The Apostles, TOIS APOSTOLOIS, 'those sent' by God are to be fully engaged in all aspects of their ministry, ministry, please note, which does not take into account the 'spiritual needs' of the congregation. The need for healing of bodies and minds, for

the liberation from sin, death and the power of the fear of death is assumed. Body, soul, mind and strength are to be consecrated and used to this purpose. In thanks from the world for this the Apostles are to expect persecution, death and the Cross. In accepting and living these conditions of the Apostolic Ministry, the Apostles are *participating* fully in the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ.

Today the Church East and West commemorates the life and witness of three great theologians through whom the Holy Spirit led the whole Church to find her voice of faith in teaching the Triune, Tri-Personal nature of God revealed in Christ. They were brothers and cousins of the same noble family in Cappadocia, a land in what is today Turkey with very many Christian converts and ancient churches dating back decades before the Roman Empire accepted Christianity officially under Emperor Constantine. Their names were Basil, Gregory and

Gregory. The name means ‘wide-eyes’ or ‘with eyes wide open,’ the eyes of the soul, that is, open wide to contemplate the mystery of God. The two Gregories are distinguished between where they served and died, one as the Abbot of the Monastery at Nazianz, with the Abbess Macrina, his sister, and the other as Bishop of the city and region of Nyssa. This second Gregory, Gregory of Nyssa, thought, preached and wrote about God’s grace and the nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit by using a very common word. That word was *METOUSIA*, ‘participation,’ *METOUSIA THEOU*, ‘participation in God’ or God’s participation,’ i.e., in our lives, in our world.

This *participation in God* and this *participation of God in our world* is exactly what is happening in today’s God. This is what happens wherever the Risen Christ is present as the Living Christ among the members of His Church. Look at yourselves and observe please how this miracle is happening

even now. You are here, participating in worship, participating in prayer—that is, in listening and speaking to God. As you continue that participation in God and as the Holy Spirit continues God’s participation in you in everyday life, who knows what may come of that? Here are some things to look for⁵:

In marriage and family and in useful, honest work, we participate in the ongoing creation of the universe. This is why, in the Eastern Church, crowns are held over the heads of bride and groom, to symbolize their royal and sacred partnership with God in the mystery of new life and of human community. Each day in the home and in the work place should be consecrated to that sacred dignity.

Where peace is made and human dignity is hallowed, even in the midst of disaster, even in the midst of war, there we participate in the life of God and God reaches down to lift up

and defend human life. The soldier who refuses to demonize his enemy, participates in Christ, true God and true human being, daring and risking his life to bring peace where only violence and hatred reigned. I have heard of an U. S. Army Reserve officer with the rank of Captain from Georgia whose life changed and whose war ended when he met the Marsh Arabs of Iraq. These were not ‘Hadjis’ or ‘Towel-Heads’ or ‘Sand Fleas’ or worse, to be killed, tortured, humiliated, abused and destroyed at will. He saw in them instead dirt farmers, just like his own people back home, deeply devout people, just like his own people, people who neither knew nor cared for politics or politicians, just like his own folks, people who never intended harm to anyone else and who now just wanted to be left alone. And, when that Army Captain participated in their humanity, when he remembered the humanity of God in Christ and saw the image of God in their faces, he participated, as Our

Lord promises in today's Gospel, in the shame and of the Cross of Christ, choosing a path that seemed either insane or wrong to many of his superiors and to many of the men under his command.

We worry so much in the local Church about lack of participation, about having too few laborers for those fields of justice and mercy and righteousness. Perhaps an *increase* in participation is what should cause us some sleepless nights, for where we participate in the life of God as God has participated in the life of humanity, terrible, extraordinary things can and will occur. Just imagine what God could make happen were even the few of us here to trust God to provide a future for us and to forget to worry about ourselves and our survival—*for the Living God is not going to let a congregation that serves Him die!*—to participate fully in the Kingdom of His mercy in this world as it now is both directly through this Church, but also

through the several agencies of mercy and good will in our community. What if we were not only to pray for the brave young men and women who serve in the Armed Forces of our nation in time of war? What if we were to pray and to work with all our strength and imagination to let them know how much we treasure and support them, and, because we do, to pray and to work with all our strength and imagination to bring them home?! Just imagine, and out of that imagination, dream, sharing those dreams with one another, and out of those dreams let Christ be present and living among us and to all whose lives we touch. ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God

and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever.

✠ Amen.

