

12 June 2022: Trinity Sunday

Almighty God, you have revealed to your Church your eternal Being of glorious majesty and perfect love as one God in Trinity of Persons: Give us grace to continue steadfast in the confession of this faith, and constant in our worship of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

For 39 years I always want to preach Trinity Sunday—it is joyous to encourage others, *to continue steadfast in the confession of this faith, and constant in worship of (the) Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. Without the doctrine of the Trinity—our apprehension of and faithfulness to God’s own self-revelation, Christianity is fuddled and vain. I hope my confession of and my worship of the Holy Trinity is the obvious basis of my life and ministry. It is not ecclesiastical affectation that when singing or speaking, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, I make a gesture of reverence, bowing from the waist, or making the Sign of the Cross.

I’ve noticed when the topic of the Trinity arises, some Christians get a confused or impatient look on their faces, especially if the person assumes the Trinity is a conundrum to be solved rationally. It is not. St. Augustine wrote, “Anyone who denies the Trinity is in danger of losing their souls; whoever tries to explain the Trinity is in danger of losing their minds.” We are not called to explain the Trinity. Here is a story to illustrate what I’m getting at, likely heard before because it is a favorite. Centuries ago, a bishop travelled by boat to make a visitation of his diocese. The bishop had heard rumors that on an obscure island there lived three old monks. Being conscientious, the bishop asked the boat captain to take him there. When the bishop, in his grand Episcopal vestments, came ashore the monks ran to him and bowed their faces to the ground. They were a ragged, wild-looking trio. The bishop began questioning them about their life together. He was amazed at their ignorance; they did not even know the Lord’s Prayer. So, the bishop spent the day teaching them the Lord’s Prayer; they were poor learners. Near dusk he was finally satisfied that perhaps they had learned it, bade them farewell and returned to the boat.

As the boat moved out to sea, suddenly the bishop heard astonished gasps from the crew. Following their gaze, he, too, saw the three monks running towards the boat on the water. They came up to the vessel, leapt on board and once again bowed low, faces pressed against the deck before the bishop. They cried, “Forgive us, Father, we have forgotten the beautiful prayer you taught us.” Astonished the bishop asked, “What do you do on your island?” They said, speaking as one voice: we lift our faces and our hands to heaven and cry, “You are three, and we are three, have mercy on us.” The bishop made them stand and he knelt in turn before each one and kissed their feet. Rising he said, “You need nothing more; go back to your island and pray for me.” “We will, Father, we will!” And they ran back across the sea.

What we call the *doctrine* of the Holy Trinity points to the Reality of God. It is not a philosophical proposition we believe in, but a divine, dynamic Being, the One whose glorious, ineffable Reality cannot be reduced to a mathematical certainty. We are not asked, or expected, to explain *how* God can be Three Persons and yet there not be three gods but One; we are invited into the Mystery of God’s own Self-disclosure of inconceivable Holiness and incomprehensible Life: to offer our lives as worship, as adoration, in wonderment and awe, in longing for the Divine, gentle ravishment beyond all logic and human experience; and in the Holy Ecstasy of God’s own communal Divinity to find our true being in the jubilant love of God. This means, practically, that our minds are offered in love’s service, and not the other way around: it means, to use a phrase of a 19th Century Orthodox monk, to *stand continually before God with the mind in the heart* (St. Theophan). How may you live this? Offer your life, not in knowledge or pride, but in ignorance and humility. The three old monks point the way. Pray: *Holy God, you are One and you are Three: have mercy on me*. Lift your face, lift your hands to God and pray: *Holy God, you are One and you are Three: have mercy on me*. Make this the continual refrain supporting all your prayer: *Holy God, you are One and you are Three: have mercy on me*. Make this the refrain and foundation of your actions, thoughts, and words: *Holy God, you are One and you are Three: have mercy on me*. All the rest springs from this.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and forever. Amen.