

04 June 2023, Trinity Sunday

I always look forward to preaching on Trinity Sunday. I do not understand Christians, especially clergy, who moan about, dismiss, or make lame jokes about Trinity Sunday. There is only one acceptable Trinity Sunday witticism: St. Augustine wrote that anyone who denies the Trinity is in danger of losing their salvation, but anyone who tries to explain the Trinity is in danger of losing their minds. Some might ignore, trivialize, or abandon Trinitarian theology because it resists logic. The Trinity is not illogical, irrational, or irrelevant; it is extra-rational, trans-logical, and essential. The Trinity—God’s own Being—is an eternal Mystery. For the ancients a mystery was not a puzzle to solve. Mystery is truly true Truth only known as we are willing to experience and know the Truth itself. We will never know standing outside and evaluating. We must enter in.

The Trinity is God’s self-revelation through which we glimpse God’s pure Being. St. Hilary of Poitiers, a 4th Century theologian, wrote that in seeking to know and understand God, we discover that God is always, “prior to our thinking.” God is the eternal constant, before all human thought and experience, all categories, and concepts. Experiencing God begins only when standing “before the certain reality” that is God.

The Holy Scriptures testify to the Trinity. As just heard, in Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus commands his disciples to baptize in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At least six other New Testament passages explicitly refer to the Trinity. This compels us to accept the Truth that God is Three Persons in one Being.

Of course, there are detractors. Some say the Trinity was invented by theologians of the 3rd and 4th Centuries, overly influenced by Greek philosophy. This is absurd on the face of it. Worse, some think Trinitarian doctrine was imposed by Emperor Constantine as a way to unite the late Roman Empire. This, too, is absurd: the Council of Nicea resulted in more controversy, not less.

To state it simply: the Church did not invent the Trinity, borrow the concept from pagans, nor was it a political expedient. Christians of the first 3 centuries *experienced* God as Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and were compelled to testify to their experience of God.

The controversy—at times intense conflict—may seem wrong, as indeed it was at times. As has been so for centuries the ‘powers that be’ can use a superficial, warped caricature of Christianity to incite the gullible, induce violence, justify persecution. However, the wrong use of Christianity does not invalidate the Faith.

Remember: the doctrine of the Trinity is born from the experience of God that followers of Jesus received. Their motivation was not rational argument but witness and testimony. Think of the Nicene Creed we recite every Sunday. Our Creed is a series of statements, assertions of who God is, how God has revealed Godself—especially in Jesus—and the result of God’s work in Jesus, personally, in and through the Church, and in the world. The Creed offers no arguments to convince or proofs to ponder. When we say “Amen,” at Creed’s end we are not saying, ‘this is reasonable, sounds good to me.’ Our “Amen!”—which by the way should be said boldly—with our “Amen!” we are saying, ‘This is it! This is the truly, true, Truth of God and God’s love for all humankind! This is what I build my life on! These words define who I am, because I am God’s, whose self-revelation is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Amen! Amen! Amen!’

Only relatively recently theologians became ‘academics.’ Historically theologians were bishops ministering in dioceses, priests pastoring parishes, monks and nuns praying in monastic communities, lay people praying, worshiping, and serving in the world. Someone once wrote theology is “...thinking with understanding formed by piety.” Traditionally, theology is born of prayer, a praying community, and corporate acts of worship, service, and sacrifice. In this case, the old ways are better.

The weirdest criticism of our historic Faith is that orthodoxy limits and spurning the Creeds and historic Faith provides endless possibilities. It is the opposite: heresy limits because heresy always exchanges part of the truth, for all the Truth. Orthodoxy opens us to the mind-blowing, ineffable Reality of God beyond all human thought. Again, the Nicene Creed explains nothing and proclaims everything, offering as gift the awesome self-revelation of God. We proclaim Jesus is “...God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father...”. This is God’s self-expression, and we could and should spend our lives entering and living into the Reality of which all the words of the Creed testify, those few soaring statements that transcend, exceed, and surpass human wisdom.

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, for ever and ever. Amen.