

Sermon for the Feast of the Holy Trinity

*“Does not wisdom call,
and understanding raise her voice?”*

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Today we come to that Sunday feared by all Lutheran pastors: Trinity Sunday. Unlike most other feast days of the Church, the feast of the Holy Trinity does not concern itself with some episode in the life of Our Lord Jesus. It does not concern itself with His birth or death; His resurrection or Ascension. It does not concern His giving of the Holy Spirit; strictly speaking, it does not concern anything in the Bible, for the word ‘Trinity’ never appears in the Bible.

It is concerned with a doctrine, an idea. It celebrates the ‘doctrine’ of the Holy Trinity, that God is one nature, one being, in three distinct persons, united to one each other by perfect love, distinguished from one another by the nature of their generation.

All pastors fear Trinity Sunday, for not only does it celebrate a doctrine, it celebrates a doctrine which not even the most astute theologians fully understand. How can one be made three? How can three be made one? How can three equal one while remaining distinct from one? How can one remain single if it is to also remain distinctly plural? If the Father and the Son are both God, what makes them different, if they are the same thing? If the Son and the Father are both God, why not say there are two gods, instead of one? *‘Wisdom calls, understanding raises her voice’* Yet there is none who can hear.

A story is told about St. Augustine, the Bishop of a city called Hippo, in North Africa. Having recently converted to Christianity, he sat upon the

beaches of the Mediterranean, and tried to understand the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He drew diagram after diagram in the sand, different organizations of circles, representing the persons of the Trinity, and lines connecting them, showing how they are one. With each wave from the shore, the diagram he had just drawn would be washed away, and he would begin to create a new one; it too, in only a moment, being swept away by the sea.

After hours of such reasoning and contemplation, an angel came to him, and commanded him, 'draw again, with your finger, a diagram which explains the Lord's Divine Majesty.' So St. Augustine inserted his finger in the sand, and immediately a wave crashed over it, wiping it away. Exasperated, St. Augustine gave up. The angel asked him 'why are you frustrated?' He answered, 'Because I cannot come to understand the Holy Trinity.'

The angel responded, 'Even as each diagram you draw cannot contain the entire ocean within its grooves, but is whipped away by the sea, so the infinite majesty of God cannot be contained by any human thought, but washes all human thoughts into itself.'

Indeed, the doctrine of the Trinity *'demolishes arguments, and every pretension that sets itself up before the knowledge of God, and it takes captive every thought, and makes it obedience to Christ.'*

The Feast of Trinity humbles us, and reminds us of this lesson: that God is God, and we are not. That He is infinite, and we are finite. That He is incomprehensible, and we are simple creatures. That He is *from everlasting to everlasting*, and we are *as the flowers of the field, which grow forth, and is cut down*.

It humbles the intellect of the theologian, and makes him no more studied than the layman. It lowers the priest, and makes him no more profound than his hearer. It strikes down the pastor and his library, and exalts the simple faith of Christians: the simple faith which does not dare plunge into the mysteries of God, which does not have the conceit of human reason, believing that God can be made small enough to be understood; the faith which confesses simply. 'I believe.' The faith which fears God. The faith that is *'the beginning of wisdom'*. The faith that hears the call *'to all the children of man.'*

These words, 'I believe' are a translation of the Latin word 'Credo', from

which we derive our word 'Creed', and on this day we confess the Creed of Athanasius. Seemingly contradictory, confusing, complex, profound, darkening, the Athanasian Creed seems more likely to confuse than to clarify our belief.

But believe me when I tell you that it is not so complicated, for the entire Creed follows from five words which explain the entire purpose and intent not only of the Creed itself, but of our faith, our religion, our Church, our Gospel. Those five words are the first in the Creed: 'Whoever desires to be saved...'

It is easy to read The Athanasian Creed as being a lengthy and repetitious definition of God. But this is wrong. It is first and foremost about our Salvation. 'Whoever desires to be saved must hold the Catholic Faith.' And what is this faith? Put in many words in today's Creed, and put in fewer words in our usually confessed Nicene Creed, it is that salvation has come. And how has it come? Through God in Christ, and through the Spirit, which works eternal life in men through the Church, creating faith, for *'if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.'*

What is the Trinity? It is the divine name of God. It is the name put upon you when you were reborn of water and the word. It is the name carved upon your body in the sign of the cross when you were baptized. It is the name which filled you through the Spirit in the washing of the Churches life-giving font. It is the name which brings salvation. And indeed, 'whoever desires to be saved' must be brought into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the Trinitarian name, the name of the Divine Majesty, of God Almighty and Eternal.

Therefore, *'ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name'*, for by this name you were bought, and *at a price*. For from the foundation of the world, Christ was crucified for you, that He may never be without you, His beloved child; that He may never be without you, His glorious flock.

Trinity Sunday celebrates, then, not a doctrine, abstract and confusing, but ascribes glory to the name of the Most High, who saved you, who has ever saved age after age, and who shall always save, until the end of things.

And, indeed, on this day, we do not only celebrate and glorify the God who is salvation, but the God who has saved and guarded his Church. For through

innumerable persecutions and countless heresies; through political assaults from without and false doctrines from within have the beast of the sea, and the beast of the earth constantly attacked Christ's Church; the Church which confesses 'the catholic faith', the church which proclaims defiantly 'I believe', the Church which saves 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

For at all times the Church has appeared frail, has appeared corrupted, has appeared decadent, has appeared to be on the brink of utter extermination. Yet *'The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise, they seemed to die; but they are in peace.'* For *'he has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has exalted the lowly.'*

What has outlived Christ's Church? What Empire, what kingdom, what temple, what worship, what philosophy has overcome the faith in the Trinity? For invincible

Rome for centuries executed and maimed the baptized, and what is it now, but ruins and a memory? Yet we still pray 'I believe'. What god or pantheon is still served by heathen sacrifices from blood-guilty hands? Those gods live on only in textbooks, and their servants rest in graves. Yet we still sing '[God in three persons, Blessed Trinity.' What philosophy or what thought still captivates the minds of the masses? They have become little more than cocktail conversation, a way to impress strangers. Yet myriad hundred millions on this day sing praise and blessing upon the Wisdom of Our Lord.

Though the Triune God, and those who confess Him, are everywhere derided as low, stupid, unenlightened, simpletons, barbarous, backwards, yet shall the Triune God shall *number their days*, and all such slanderers, and all their ideas will one day be reckoned among the superstitions of a past age. But the Trinity will be praised with ever-new voices, and worshiped by ever-reborn hearts. For Our Lord, the eternal Christ has said it:

'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Words shall never pass away.'

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*Preached by Pastor
Fields*

*Sermon texts: Proverbs
8:1-4, 22-31; Acts 2:14, 22-36; John 8:48-59*