

May 26, 2024

The Holy Trinity

Texts: Isaiah 6:1-7; Romans 11:33-36; John 3:1-17

Trinity Sunday is a rather unique festival in the Church Year. The other feasts and festivals commemorate either a specific person or a specific event. Today, though, we commemorate a Biblical teaching, that of God as the Trinity – three Persons, one God.

The teaching of the Trinity is hard, even impossible, for our human minds to fully grasp. It must be taken of faith. It must be believed. On this day, then, we the Church are reminded of a key truth: though God's ways are often beyond our understanding, nevertheless His ways are always for our eternal good.

The truth of God as Triune is again, something beyond our human grasp. That there are three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – who are each distinct from each other, who are each fully God, and yet are together only one God, this is beyond our human reason or logic. One plus one plus one ought to equal three, yet with God, it's one.

We know this is true because God reveals Himself as being the Trinity in His words to us in the Bible. For example, the Son prays to the Father and speaks that the Father will send the Holy Spirit in His (the Son's) name. Or the Father loves the world and sends His only-begotten Son, so that those who are begotten by the Spirit would believe and be saved.

Though the word "trinity" doesn't itself appear in the Bible, the teaching, the truth of one God in three Persons, is all throughout its pages.

In learning about the doctrine of the Trinity and how it is beyond our human comprehension, we are reminded of the greatness of God and how He is beyond human comprehension.

We are tempted to try to bring God down to our level, to confine Him with our limits, to enclose Him with our boundaries. We want Him to be "relatable," just one of us. Though we don't realize it, this desire comes from our sinful flesh, which still is enticed by those words of Satan in the Garden of Eden: "You will be like God."

If God is down at my level, then I get to know – and decide – good and evil for myself. Sure, God can have superpowers so that He can give me what I want when I pray, but really, He's not that far above me.

Maybe He makes mistakes – and so I can't be condemned for making mistakes when it comes to keeping His Commandments. Maybe He's bound by time like I am, and so when He had the prophets, apostles, and evangelists write His Word, it was just a product of its time and doesn't entirely apply today. Maybe He doesn't always tell the exact truth, or truth is relative, and so it's up to me and my judgment to decide what's true.

All this works to bring God down and elevate myself, until finally I'm God's equal... or maybe even above Him.

Such foolish, prideful notions are totally wrong, going against what God has revealed of Himself in Holy Scripture. When Isaiah beholds a vision of the Lord, it isn't just that the Lord is very

bright and Isaiah could use some sunglasses. No, Isaiah is overwhelmed by God's glory and holiness. His cry is a confession that, as a sinner, he ought to be destroyed for being in the presence of the Lord of hosts. The Lord's divine majesty is far too great for a man with any trace of sin to handle.

And this isn't just an "Old Testament" thing, either. When the apostle John beholds the Lord Jesus at the beginning of Revelation, he falls to the ground like a dead man. Remember, this isn't some average, sinful Joe. This is the disciple whom Jesus loved, who saw Jesus in glory at the Transfiguration, who witnessed the Ascension. Even St. John cannot stand in the presence of the Lord of glory until that Lord lays His hand upon him and says, "Do not be afraid."

It isn't just the Lord's glory and holiness that are beyond man's grasp. So too, as St. Paul confesses, are the Lord's wisdom and knowledge. The Lord God understands everything, perfectly. The Lord God knows everything, perfectly. And this perfect wisdom and knowledge bring Him to act perfectly. His ways are perfect, as are His judgments and decisions.

We as humans have no basis to question what the Lord says or does, because we aren't perfect. Even before sin corrupted our reason and understanding, it was still limited, limited because we are finite creations, not the infinite Creator.

Right and wrong, good and evil, how things should or shouldn't be – these are up to God's judgments, not ours. And these aren't dependent on us understanding them in order that they be true and right, any more than Earth's orbit around the Sun depending on our personal understanding of gravity and astrophysics.

As we consider the greatness of the Almighty God, it might seem that He is so great and so powerful and so wonderful that He would forever be above us. As David sang in our Introit, from Psalm 8, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, and the son of man, that you care for him?"

Yet among all the perfect attributes of God – His perfect knowledge, His perfect wisdom, His perfect power – is also His perfect love. Because He is the God who loves, who is Love, He loves us and desires to have us be with Him. David continues, marveling at the love of God: "Yet You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor."

God created humanity – each and every one of you – out of love. And in that love, He desires to join you and all people to Himself. In the Trinity, the three Persons are joined in perfect unity, perfect peace, perfect love. And He desires to bring mankind into that love. The night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed "for those who will believe in me through (the apostles') word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us."

Though He is beyond us in glory and power and holiness, our God desires to be with us, even to join us to Himself. That is a love that defies comprehension.

That love led our Lord to do things beyond human reason or "common sense." He first joined Himself to us by becoming one of us. The Son of God, who was before worlds began, took on flesh and fully became a man.

The Infinite One confined Himself to a single cell in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The All-Knowing One humbled Himself and learned as a boy, growing in wisdom and in stature. The Almighty

One endured hunger and thirst, temptation and pain, even though He certainly had the power to stop them at any point. The Sinless One became sin – not His, but ours – so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. The One who is Life and the source of all life suffered death, that we who were dead in sin might have life.

It is beyond our understanding how the immortal God died and then rose again in His body, but it is wonderfully true all the same. And He did it all for us.

Having wiped away the sin of the world, not by a burning coal but by His holy, precious blood, our Lord has established ways where He joins us to Himself and gives us His life and salvation. These ways – or means of grace, as they’re called – also go beyond our understanding.

One such way is Holy Baptism, which Jesus speaks about with Nicodemus. Our Lord declares that it is no mere symbol or outward ritual, but a new birth from above. In this miracle of water and the Spirit, we are begotten anew. God the Father becomes our Father. God the Son becomes our Brother. God the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us. At the font, our old sinful self is crucified with Christ, and a new man is raised to life.

How does this happen? How can water and Word do such great things when the only change we immediately see is damp hair? It all happens because it is the limitless power of God at work. And again, His workings don’t depend on our intellectual understanding. Rather, they are received by faith.

This is true for the other means of grace, including the Sacrament of the Altar, Holy Communion. There, the Son of God humbles Himself to physically come to us in bread and wine.

He comes in such a humble, ordinary way so that we might not cry out in terror like Isaiah nor faint away like St. John, but instead approach Him in humble joy and reverence. There, those who eat His flesh and drink His blood in a worthy manner receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, while those who do so unworthily eat and drink judgment on themselves.

How can this be? How does an infinite God come in finite food? How can eating and drinking have spiritual effects? As the Psalm says, “Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases.” That includes coming to earth in bread and wine. He has said in His Word that this is what He does, and His Word is truth.

That great Word, the Holy Scriptures, is yet another way in which He grants us grace and increases our faith. By our own efforts, we cannot know nor reveal God. As we read, “For who has known the mind of the Lord?” This doesn’t mean that we can’t know anything about our Lord. No, we do know of Him because He reveals Himself in the Word.

In its pages, God grants us some of the riches of His wisdom and knowledge. He tells us His judgments, shows us His ways. We cannot know the mind of the Lord on our own, but the Spirit knows the thoughts of God, being Himself God, and the Spirit is the One who inspired the Bible. Thus, through God’s Word we are given insight into the very mind of the Triune God.

Can we know everything? No! Our minds are limited and corrupted by sin, and God’s mind is infinite and holy. Nevertheless, what is revealed through the Word we can know and trust completely. We can know that God has made us and all creatures. We can know that we have sinned and fall short

of the glory of God. We can know that there is no gift we could give to earn our way back to God, and so He sent His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

These truths we know, not because we figured them out, but because the Lord in love and mercy has revealed them to us.

The Word also then reveals to us how we are to live as Christians. To be a Christian is not just to have head knowledge of God or the Bible. No, it is a new life being joined to the Triune God, lived according to what is said in the Bible. His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path as we walk through this life. Our God is the Creator of the universe and the one who knows all things, and so He has given us a perfect guide in His holy Word.

Will we always perfectly understand why we are to live as He directs us? No. Many times we might, but our sinful flesh hates God's righteousness and so plugs its ears against the Word. Yet even when our lack of understanding doesn't stem from willful ignorance, but rather from our existence as limited beings, God's ways are still perfect, as is the path He directs us to walk.

As we walk in His ways, we shine His light into the world, that others might be led out of darkness. We don't know the exact path on which our Lord is leading us, though He certainly does. What we do know, however, is that the final destination of our path is His heavenly presence, where we will experience the depth of His riches that we cannot now comprehend. There we, gathered with all the saints of every age, will behold the King, the Lord of hosts, and we will rejoice in His goodness forever.

In the name of Jesus, amen.