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The Holy Trinity (Series A)

June 15, 2014

Text: Genesis 1:1–2:4a; Matthew 28:16–20

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Ps. 8:1,8a). Human language is utterly inadequate in our attempts to praise and worship the Lord. We use adjectives like majestic, awesome, sublime, transcendent, and so forth in an attempt to exalt the name of the Lord. But in the end, our words fail us. They just can't do justice to God. And that's a good thing, dear saints of God!!

If we could describe God comprehensively and thoroughly with our words and concepts and formulations, that God would not be worthy of worship and devotion. Would a God that could be summed up, described, and otherwise dissected by human thought and speculation, be worthy of living for? Or dying for? I say no. The prophet Isaiah says this about the Lord, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

The good news that I bring to you today is that our God – the Trinitarian God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one holy majestic God in three divine persons – that God shatters our attempts to describe Him adequately. And yes, this is good news. For the mystery of the Trinity is that while God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is absolutely transcendent above heaven and earth He is also immanently present in His creation! And not only in creation in general, but God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit chooses to live in dwell within our human hearts and souls. The same God who cannot be contained by the universe (I Kings 8:27) also dwells within you graciously and redemptively! How can those two statements be true? Words and logic and systematic explication would fail me. And yet, the Bible declares them both to be true.

Every year, when this particular Sunday comes along, I am exhilarated and challenged. Today, like no other day in the church year, we consider the mysterious and sublime nature and person of God. On Trinity Sunday, I get to preach about God as He is revealed in Holy Scripture. It's a glorious privilege! And an extreme

challenge. In 20 minutes or less, I must declare to you who God is, the same God whose thoughts and ways are above my ways as the heavens are higher than the earth!

St. Augustine, the 5<sup>th</sup> century theologian and bishop from North Africa, said this to his congregation one Sunday about trying to comprehend God the Trinity, “For if you have been able to comprehend what you would say, it is not God; if you have been able to comprehend it, you have comprehended something else instead of God. If you have been able to comprehend Him as you think, by so thinking you have deceived yourself” (cited in *The Trinity* p. 47-48 by Olson & Hall). How’s that for a challenge. Try to speak clearly and comprehendingly about God and you might just find yourself deceived! Church history is littered with heretical attempts to explain and clarify the mystery of the Holy Trinity: one God in three divine persons.

Martin Luther, the 16<sup>th</sup> century German reformer, had these colorful words to say about man’s ability to describe God comprehensively, “How this intertrinitarian relation is carried on is something we must believe; for even to the angels, who unceasingly behold it with delight, it is unfathomable. And all who have wanted to comprehend it have broken their necks in the effort” (cited in *The Trinity* p. 68 by Olson & Hall). I trust we won’t need to call in the paramedics today but Luther’s caution is wise and prudent.

What we are to do is to hear God’s Word with confident humility so that we might know God as He has revealed Himself to us in Holy Scripture. For God wants us to know Him as He is; His self-revelation in Holy Scripture is true and trustworthy.

Today’s sermon on God’s Trinitarian nature will not give you any hints or practical advice on how you are to live your Christian life and yet today’s sermon may be, in many ways, the most important for your present and eternal life. For God the Trinity is the beginning, middle, and end of all Christian devotion. God is not a means to an end. He is the end, the fulfillment, the consummation of all Christian hopes and aspirations.

Throughout the many centuries of Church history, theologians, pastors, teachers, priests, mystics, and saints from every land and country have contemplated and adored God the Holy Trinity. The Scriptural witness is clear. The Lord God of heaven and earth is one. The great *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 rings with beautiful clarity, “Hear of Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Not only is God one in purpose,

will and power, He is one in His divine being. Proclaim it loud and long, saint of God, the Lord our God is one!!

And yet we confess that this One God is also three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian faith does not believe that one God is divided in three ways so as to equal one. Perish the thought! Rather, the Christian faith proclaims that three divine Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are mysteriously one God, each sharing equally in the divine nature and yet ordered in divine relationship. The mystery cannot be resolved. Nor should we try.

And yet the Biblical witness is clear. The first 3 verses of the Bible proclaim God's Trinitarian nature. "In the beginning, God (notice the singular) created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God (notice the distinction of person) was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." All creation came into existence through God the Father speaking it into existence by His Word (God the Son, the Word of God according to John 1:1) through the living-giving presence of the Holy Spirit.

Creation is a Trinitarian work of grace and divine self-giving. The Trinity did not need to create but He did so in order to give of Himself to the world. We mustn't forget this about God. He not only wants to give the good gifts of creation (land, air, food, water, family, etc.) but most especially He wants to give of Himself. This is beautifully seen in the creation of man. Gen. 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

From the moment of your conception, all of you were given God's divine image. Your intrinsic dignity and nobility does not lay in your accomplishments, your physical appearance or any other such characteristic; rather, your dignity is intrinsic to who you are as a human being created in the image of the Trinitarian God. The life you possess is nothing less than a portion of God's life. Consider that for a few moments, dear parents and especially you fathers on Father's Day. God has privileged you to be caretakers of human souls endowed with His own life, created in His image. Consider your daily vocations and callings, your jobs, your volunteer activities (*examples?*) ... all of them serve to enhance and care for the lives of people imprinted with the image of God. There is no true vocation that lacks inherent dignity and honor. All of this is a gift of the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The clearest Biblical revelation of God's Trinitarian nature is given in Matthew 28:16–20, today's gospel reading. And it too reveals a God who gives of Himself. Jesus, the incarnate 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Holy Trinity, gives the Trinitarian name to His Church to be used in each and every water baptism. When people receive God's name in baptism and are taught His truth, God gives them His eternal life. The divine image, which was so marred by original and actual sin, is restored and renewed after the glory and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brandon and Erika, not only has God blessed you with a beautiful daughter, created in His image, but MaKayla is now a newborn child of God the Trinity. Her life is safe and secure in His undying life. Such is the promise to her and to you all. "I am with you to end the age" says Jesus. God the Trinity is the beginning, middle, and end of all Christian devotion. God is not a means to an end. He is the end, the fulfillment, the consummation of all Christian hopes and aspirations.

"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" That majestic name – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is sweet and precious to us. Join me in declaring, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever." Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.