

**Sermon     June 12, 2022**

**Holy Trinity**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's a natural fact that some people just don't like the Athanasian Creed. We no longer live at a time when well-to-do folks like us spent their leisure time studying and making philosophy or even theology. We sum up Bible teachings in one or two proof texts and move on. Then something as towering as the Athanasian Creed comes along every Trinity Sunday. We read through the entire document, which then concludes, "One cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully." There is often pushback by us modern peoples. Many say, "You really don't need to believe ALL THAT to be saved." Well, if that wasn't true, why would they say it is all necessary? I'll present that "why" later. Plus, many of us are left wondering if we really are saved, because who of us truly knows, understands, and believes everything in this gargantuan Creed? You're probably OK there, too. I'll explain that later as well. So let's get into the nitty gritty of what is all going on here on with the Holy Trinity and the Athanasian Creed, and just what it is that the Lord of the Church wants to accomplish through these Creeds.

The truth behind the Holy Trinity is simply the truth of God's love for Himself and for you. That sounds like it would be something good to know, right? So it's not all so bad after all. Let's relax as we review the particulars about our Triune God.

What is the Trinity? It's one God yet three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Everything else that is said about this is simply to maintain the truth of those seemingly incompatible sentences: God is One and God is three. The true Christian faith is this: "We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity." Easy peasy. We will never understand how this can actual be true, so we just leave the how, why, and heavy lifting to God. What fun would it be to have a God that made complete sense? One that you could fully describe on the back of a cocktail napkin? We would all like a little more than that to sink our teeth into, right?

But there is one other thing that always comes along. The Creeds are not satisfied dealing only with the three-in-oneness of God. We read this in the Athanasian Creed: “Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that we also believe faithfully *in the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, for the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man.” You might notice this same emphasis in the Apostles’ and the Nicene Creeds. Much more is written about Jesus Christ than God the Father Almighty or the Holy Spirit. It’s more than just a confession that God is one in three. We confess the three Persons of the One God, and we confess, in particular, and with great emphasis, the character of Jesus Christ’s two natures, that is, that God has become Man for us, that our Savior is both true God and true Man. That is *non-negotiable*.

The Council of Nicaea, which met May through August in the year of our Lord 325, was especially crucial for our understanding of the Trinity, and gave us most of what we confess together in our Nicene Creed. The Council rejected the heresy of Arianism, which taught that Jesus was not fully God, but that He was created by the Father, which contradicts what many Scriptures teach about Jesus. The subsequent Council of Constantinople which met May through July in 381 firmed up this Creed and put the finishing touches on what we now recite in the Nicene Creed. There we confess that Jesus Christ is “begotten of the Father before all the ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made.” All that to say: “He is God.” And then we say, “who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man.” Which is to say, “He is Man.”

These two things, the *Threefold Personality of the One God* and the *Incarnation of the Second Person*, go hand-in-hand. If you get Jesus wrong, then it doesn’t matter what else you say about the Trinity. To get Jesus right, we need to have the Father and the Holy Spirit. Because the revelation of God as the Holy Trinity is the revelation of God’s Love, and God loves us in and through Jesus Christ.

Through the ages there have been attempts to find illustrations of the Holy Trinity in Nature. There's the egg with its shell, white, and yolk. There's the apple with its skin, meat, and seeds. People have used water to illustrate the Trinity which can be in gas, liquid, or solid form. We even have St. Patrick with his three-petaled shamrock. All these illustrations get us started, but they cannot perfectly represent the Holy Trinity. They all quickly break down upon closer examination. The created always reflects something of the Creator. Even the Scriptures speak of plants that die when they send their seeds to the ground. The seeds, in turn, later come forth and bear a hundred-fold harvest. This illustrates something of the passage made from death over to life. It points to how our Lord's one life given on the cross now brings eternal life to all believers. But with the shamrock, water, apple, and egg, we wind up with either three different types of material, where the Trinity in truth is one substance, or we have one type of material in three different forms, where the three persons in the Trinity are inseparable.

The best analogy for the Holy Trinity is illustrated in *human relationships*. It is the best because it is based upon God's self-description: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Even the titles Father and Son denote a family relationship. The distinction between the Persons is internal, the way they relate to one another. The Son is begotten of the Father from whom the Spirit proceeds. God the Father is the Lover. He loves the Son, who is His Beloved. By their love for each other, the Holy Spirit flows outward. Even this is a long shot, because we only know imperfect fathers, sons, and lovers. We have never really known God's perfect, completely selfless and giving love.

The Apostle John writes about the Trinity in this way. He writes that *God is Love*. The Son is sent by the Father into the world to love the world, to bring His Holy Spirit to humanity. This is how the Father loves the world: He sends His Beloved who bestows His Spirit from the cross. We receive the Holy Spirit through the Son, the Living Word. We are born again of water and the Spirit. We are reconciled and have peace with the Father. We are given eternal life.

People have different ideas as to why God created us humans. Some say God needed to prove a point to the angelic beings that His ways are just over against the ways of Satan. Others say God created us because he was lonely

and needed somebody to love. Well, God is Love, but the Trinity is not lonely. He does not need someone to love. Even so, he created us to be recipients of His love. Our proper place in this universe is as God's own beloved children. That is always what we were meant to be, what we were created for. And when we failed, when we rejected his love and chose to renounce our membership in God's family, God did not reject us. He reached out with more love to make us His again. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, have sought to make you his, to bring you into this mystery of selfless and giving love. He adopts us as his children in baptism where we receive his name and family crest. He speaks to you in the Spirit-breathed Words of Jesus. And He feeds you with the Divine and Human Natures of Christ's Holy Body and Blood, given and shed for you, to forgive sins, to bring peace with God, and to bestow the Holy Spirit. It is the supernatural meal of the Holy Family, God's children gathered at his table, members of Jesus Christ, the Church.

The Holy Trinity is not an abstraction. God has flesh in the Man Jesus Christ and through Him, by the Spirit, you have access to the Father. We do not hold to this ancient Creed because it is obvious or logical. We do not emphasize it because we like to think deep thoughts about philosophy and the nature of the Divine. We hold to it because God this is exactly how God has revealed himself to us. This is Who Love is. This is the God we are given. And what He gives to us is God in Three Persons and the Son in our Flesh, our Savior. Amen!

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