

Today is a unique day in the life of the Church. Most of our feast days during the year celebrate saints or Christological events, but today we celebrate and focus upon the Mystery of the Trinity. Mystery, of course, is truly beyond our limits as material beings, placed in time and space, we do not, and for that matter cannot, intuitively comprehend the nature of God. We have rationally formulated, derived, the concept of the Trinity from what God has revealed to us through Scripture, but still we grapple with apprehending the reality of this doctrine.

As Christians, we are monotheistic. There is only One God. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." As you all probably recognize, this is the great Shema (as it is called by the Jews) from Deuteronomy 4:6. Here is emphasized for us the Oneness of God, and even though there are indications of the Threeness of God in the Old Testament, it isn't really until we get to the New Testament that the other two persons of the Trinity are made explicit.

We assert with the Church catholic the doctrine of the Triune God, and we use this lens to interpret Holy Scripture. But to acknowledge the Triune nature of God is by no means the same as understanding God. How many people have heard this doctrine and then turned away from the orthodox Christian faith? "This makes no sense," they say. "How can I believe in something that I cannot comprehend?" Yet I would assert that a God we can comprehend, that we can place easily within our existing categories of thought, is no God at all.

To describe the oneness of God, the Church has settled upon the Greek term, *homoousios* – of the same substance. What we mean by this is that all three persons of the Trinity have a common nature and share common attributes, and even have a common will. What this

means, however, is difficult, for by what means are they, therefore, distinct?

Well, to describe the distinction, the threeness of persons, we focus upon their relationships as Biblically expressed. For instance, the Bible uses the term, "Only Begotten Son of the Father," to describe the relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity. Again, we must be careful to not think of begottenness as defined in time, but rather in terms of begetting of the same kind. As a human father begets a human son and not a canine son, the Divine Father begets the Divine Son. They are of the same substance, essence. At the same time, the terms "father" and "son" implies an hierarchy in the relationship. The Son is begotten of the Father. The Father initiates and the Son responds in obedience.

Likewise, the Biblical term describing the relationship between the Father and the Holy Spirit is, "Proceeding." The Spirit proceeds from the Father, and this relationship again implies an hierarchy. The Holy Spirit originates in the Father and in some sense emanates from Him. These relational terms deal with the ontology of the persons. They are statement of being. In the West, the "filioque" was added to the Nicene Creed to protect the divinity of the Son. It is an accurate statement, for according to the Bible, Christ ascends into heaven and sends the Spirit to the Church on Pentecost. The "filioque" is functionally true, but is not so much a statement of the eternal relationship between the Spirit and the Son.

But importantly for us this morning, we must ask why should the doctrine of the Trinity make any difference to my faith? To address this question, I am relying heavily this morning on the book, *Life in the Trinity*, by Donald Fairbairn, and I commend it to your reading. We start to answer the question with a Biblical anthropology, a Biblical understanding of what it means to be human. According to Genesis 1, we were created in God's image, and we received the Spirit of God at our creation. The bible literally says that God breathed into us, He in-spirited us in a unique way. We also know that we were set over creation to rule it and

govern it. God established us to be His kings in the physical creation, representing the spiritual being of God to the world because we were made in His image and, in the Holy Spirit, shared in His Glory. At creation, we therefore participated, in a derivative way, in the life of the Trinity.

Of course, in our disobedience, we became separated from the source of our image, and the glory of God was lost to us. The rest of the Bible after Genesis chapter 3 is about the restoration of all things in God. The key event in this work is the Incarnation. The second person of the Trinity, the Son, Jesus Christ, lovingly obeys the Father and takes humanity into Himself. Christ thus become the perfect image of God within Creation. As Athanasius says, Christ becomes man so that man can become God.

Now certainly there are differing aspects of our salvation that are emphasized by various theological schools. The West, influenced somewhat by Augustine, tends to focus upon the juridical reality of salvation. There is a legal declaration by God, that because of Christ, we are restored into the family of God. Other theologies will focus more upon the sanctifying effects of our salvation. We become holy as God is holy. We begin to live in a manner that pleases God. The focus here is upon behavior more than upon doctrine, though we can't really separate the two for right belief informs right living.

But may I suggest, that neither of these captures the real heart of the matter. Instead, we should focus upon the eternal interchange of divine love within the Trinity. We see in the incarnate life of the second person of the Trinity a complete submission to the Father in love. And in the Godhead, as well as in the incarnate ministry of Christ, we see the Father in turn glorifying the Son. In this interchange, how do we fit in?

To answer this, we note the persistent Biblical language that describes us believers as being

“In Christ”. Therefore we participate, again in a derivative manner, with Christ in the divine and eternal love of God. We have a part in the eternal interchange of love within the persons of the Trinity. Far from being some distant academic and theological construct, we see that the Trinity is at the heart of our faith. It is crucial to our life and spiritual health. Our salvation reconnects us to God, in Christ, by the Holy Ghost. In this frame of thought, spiritual maturity is thus envisaged as union with God, what is known in the East as, *Theosis*.

So how does this practically work itself out in our life, in our daily experience? First, let us recognize the impact to our identity, to our self-conceptualization. The modern notion is that identity is something we choose and create in isolation, but this is not the case. Identity is formed primarily by our relationships. I am a Christian. I am part of a specific family. I am married. I am a husband. I am a priest. I am an engineer. All of these aspects of my identity concern who I am connected to and how I interact in the world. The modern conception is that one “finds himself” by isolating from relationships and responsibilities. But when we do so, we find out that we are nothing. It is our place in community that makes us who we are.

Now our most important relationship is our incorporation in Christ to God. This relationship is vital, and in it we find our core identity and significance. We might desire success in the world or fame or fortune, but none of these worldly priorities can provide for us the solid foundation of identity that we have in Christ. If the primary lens through which we conceptualize ourselves is not Christ, then we will never find the acceptance we crave or the significance that we have lost through our sin.

Because God is the source of all being, those established in Christ know who they are. Their identities are steadfast and sure, and are independent of the chaos that surrounds them. In fact, identity becomes more certain in the midst of chaos for the distractions and temptations of the world are stripped away. God in Christ by the Holy Ghost can never be taken from us.

John 14:27 reads, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." When our identities are firmly establish in Jesus, then the peace of Christ is made manifest in our lives. We will always be surrounded by the turmoil of a fallen world, but in the midst of the stresses and struggles, the injuries and infirmities, we cannot be shaken if we are in Christ. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Being "in Christ" also transforms our work in this world. No longer do we seek to earn significance through career, or to build a kingdom for ourselves to ensure security, but in Jesus, our work becomes an expression of love to God. It becomes a response instead of a means or an end in itself. Being in Christ means that we can now risk great things, knowing that failure does not mean rejection. In fact, our failures will be used by God to advance His Kingdom. Our work is re-framed to be obedience to God, and obedience is a true expression of love. Christ loves the Father and obeys Him, and we too participate in such love of God. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." (John 14:21)

Finally, may we understand that our restored relationship to God, in Christ, by the Holy Ghost, is the only way that we can truly have relationship with each other. Without God at the center of our beings, we cannot sincerely love one another. Membership in God is membership in each other. As it enables us to truly love God, so too it enables us to truly love each other. Loving each other is obediently loving God. Outside of Christ, all human interactions are reduced to manipulation and usury.

2026-05-31

Trinity Sunday

K. Bartel, 6

Considering all of this, we are reminded this morning that the doctrine of the Trinity is not an esoteric and fringe construct, but it is at the very heart of our faith. Our redemption in Christ restores to us our participation in God, allowing us to experience union with the divine, eternal, source of all being. In this restoration we find unshakable identity, we obtain the peace of Christ, we demonstrate the obedience of Christ, and we become truly incorporate in the Body of Christ. Thus may we embrace and worship the Triune God, not just on this particular Sunday, but every moment of our lives, until He bring us safely into the fullest experience of His reality.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.