

The Feast of the Holy Trinity, Sunday, June 16, 2019

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What To Do with the Holy Trinity[John 8:48–59](#)

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

Eph 1:2

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus said, "I HONOR MY FATHER. . . . IF ANYONE KEEPS MY WORD, HE WILL NEVER SEE DEATH. . . . ABRAHAM REJOICED THAT HE WOULD SEE MY DAY. HE SAW IT AND WAS GLAD. . . . TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM" (vv 49, 51, 56, 58).

Let's be clear about one thing: the point of Trinity Sunday isn't to figure God out. Because however we figure, we won't do Him justice. And it isn't about proving His existence. He's more real than anything we call reality. And it isn't about justifying His ways to man. He's the judge of all. He condemns, and He justifies. And it isn't even about making Him understandable or relatable, though He graciously permits us to know Him through Holy Scripture.

3.

God isn't an idea or a concept any more than you or I are ideas or concepts. We are living beings—creatures of the human kind. And who is He? He's the one and only God, the divine Being—uncreated, infinite, eternal, and almighty—in three distinct persons. Try wrapping your head around that one! Or better yet, don't, because it'll make your head explode! God can't be reduced to facts or bits of information. He's too big and too personal for that. The Trinity isn't a physics equation or an engineering problem. In fact, the Trinity isn't a problem at all, and He certainly doesn't require a solution.

So what do we do with a God like this? How do we approach a Being who is so different, so much bigger, and so much holier than we are? Who already knows us, knows our nature, our thoughts, words, and deeds, more intimately than we know ourselves? What do we do with the Holy Trinity? We do this: "*We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another. But the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.*"

That's what the Athanasian Creed says. In other words, don't try to figure Him out. Worship Him. Bow your head in adoration. Bend your knee in homage. Shout and sing His praise: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end." Amen and amen.

This is how God reveals Himself to us in Scripture. It's how He makes Himself known. He tells us that He is one God. He also tells us that He's also Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One God in three persons. This is what we mean by the Holy Trinity. And so that's how we worship Him. The Christian faith has no room for theories about God. It has no place for speculation about what He might be like. It isn't based on how you or I or anyone else feel about Him or what we think about Him. He is who He is, and He is who He says He is, and so that's what we confess and that's how we worship Him.

But we sinners have a problem with this. We prefer our gods to be small. We prefer them to fit our thoughts and feelings. We prefer to make them in our own image, like us. As sinners, our motto for gods is the same as our motto for burgers and gender identity and sexual activity: "Have it your way." And so we do. We make gods that are like us, gods who are small and petty and fickle. Have you ever read Greek and Roman mythology? Have you noticed how similar those gods seem to us? They have the same lusts, the same hatred, the same envy, spite, and murderous thoughts, just a bit more power. They take it up a notch. Mount Olympus deifies sin. Someone said that in the beginning God created man in His image, and that ever since man has been returning the favor. That's not far from the truth.

What our world wants are gods who will be there if we need them, gods who will respond whenever we call for them, gods whom we can manipulate and control, gods for our convenience. Vending machine gods. What we don't want is a God so big or so real that He'll be in our way or affect our lives or have His own plans and purposes for us. He certainly shouldn't be telling us what to do or not to do. Who does that God think He is anyway? When our hearts and minds are so full of ourselves, when we're stuffed with our own selfish thoughts and desires, when the universe revolves around the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I, well, it doesn't leave much room for a God like the real Holy Trinity. Like it or not, He can't be stuffed into a corner or scheduled for a convenient time on the calendar.

2.

And that's precisely the trouble Jesus ran into with His own people. Their concept of God was too small. They didn't have room in the Godhead for the Son, much less for the Holy Spirit. And certainly not for a Son WHO BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG them, whose eyes could watch them, whose words could call them, whose

touch could give life (Jn 1:14). And if you don't recognize the Son who came in the flesh, who is approachable by human beings, how in the world will you know the Father who sent Him, WHO DWELLS IN UNAPPROACHABLE LIGHT, WHOM NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN OR CAN SEE (1 Tim 6:16)? They didn't recognize the Son and so they didn't know the Father. They couldn't figure Jesus into the equation. He blew their minds. "AREN'T WE RIGHT IN SAYING THAT YOU'RE A SAMARITAN AND HAVE A DEMON?" (v 48).

They're wrong, of course, but they put their finger on something important. In the end, it's impossible to be neutral about Jesus. He can't be just a nice guy, a good teacher, or even an enlightened man. Not with the things He says. Not with the things He does. So if you've already decided beforehand that He can't possibly be God, then I suppose Samaritan or demon are about the only categories left. If He's not the Lord, then He must be a lunatic or a liar and deceiver like the devil himself.

So JESUS ANSWERED them: "I DON'T HAVE A DEMON, BUT I HONOR MY FATHER, AND YOU DISHONOR ME. YET I DON'T SEEK MY OWN GLORY; THERE IS ONE WHO SEEKS IT, AND HE'S THE JUDGE. TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, IF ANYONE KEEPS MY WORD, HE WILL NEVER SEE DEATH" (vv 49–51). Whoever believes in the Son believes also in the Father. Whoever trusts the Son trusts the Father. Whoever keeps the Son's word has the Son's life in Him and so lives with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever.

But without the Son, they can't have God the Father. Those who deny that Jesus is truly the Son of God lose God entirely. They don't have part of the Trinity. They have none of the Trinity. Their god is fundamentally different. That was the trouble in the fourth century with the heresy called Arianism. Bishop Arius denied the full divinity of Jesus. He said that there was a time when the Son of God didn't exist. And so, for him, the Son was not Creator but creature, not "*God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, of one substance with the Father,*" but of a similar substance. Like God, but not God. It's the problem still today with Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other sects and cults. And if Jesus isn't the divine Son of God, then God hasn't died for you and the blood of God doesn't cover the sin of the world. But "*it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man*" (Athanasian Creed).

1.

When Jesus speaks about His Father, the Jews think only about father Abraham. They say, "ARE YOU GREATER THAN OUR FATHER ABRAHAM, WHO DIED? AND THE PROPHETS DIED! WHO DO YOU MAKE YOURSELF OUT TO BE? Since Abraham

and the prophets died, how can You, Jesus, safeguard anyone from death?" (v 53). Because Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God the Father, "*begotten of the Father before all worlds.*" He comes from the bosom of the Father. He has an intimate friendship with the Father. And what He says is true. If they knew the Father, they would know that. If they were spiritual children of Abraham, they would see that. "YOUR FATHER ABRAHAM REJOICED THAT HE WOULD SEE MY DAY. HE SAW IT AND WAS GLAD" (v 56). That sends them completely over the edge. "What! How? YOU AREN'T YET FIFTY YEARS OLD, AND HAVE YOU SEEN ABRAHAM?" (v 57). Indeed, He has! "BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM" (v 58). He claims equality with God. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He brought Israel out of Egypt with a strong hand and a mighty arm. The One standing before them is both eternal and thirty years old—eternal according to His divine nature but conceived and born in time according to His human nature!

Although He is God, the irony is that Jesus, like Abraham, dies. He allows Himself to be treated like an ordinary man and even worse than an ordinary man. He endures shame. He's not greater than Abraham in avoiding death; He's greater in overcoming it! He died, but on the third day He rose again. And He lives to raise the dead! "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, AN HOUR IS COMING, AND IS NOW HERE, WHEN THE DEAD WILL HEAR THE VOICE OF THE SON OF GOD, AND THOSE WHO HEAR WILL LIVE" (Jn 5:25).

The Son honors of the Father by coming in the flesh to do the Father's will—to be and reveal the God that no one could imagine or theorize, the God greater than anything we might think or feel. God not speculated but God crucified, as real and as saving as the bloody thorns, the rusty nails, and the sharp slivers that tore at His body. And now EXALTED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, AND HAVING RECEIVED FROM THE FATHER THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT, HE HAS Poured OUT the Spirit on His Church (Acts 2:33).

And so we, too, honor the Father by receiving the Spirit and honoring the Son. The point of Trinity Sunday isn't about us figuring God out; it's about the blessed Holy Trinity figuring us out by forgiving our sins. It isn't about us fitting God into our lives; it's about God the Holy Trinity fitting us into His life. And that's exactly what He does. We have a God big enough and personal enough to deal with us, with our sins, and with death itself. And He has. The Father sent the Son into our flesh, that we might be born again in His image, in the image of Jesus Christ, and have His life in ourselves, that we might be children of the heavenly Father and temples of the Holy Spirit, who with the Son live and reign forever.

TO THE BLESSED HOLY TRINITY BE GLORY AND HONOR FOREVER.

Him we worship and to Him we sing:

Holy Father, holy Son, Holy Spirit, three we name Thee;
Though in essence only one, Undivided God we claim Thee
And, adoring, bend the knee while we own the mystery.
(Lutheran Service Book 940:5)

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ
Jesus.

Phil 4:7
