

The Feast of the Holy Trinity, June 7, 2020

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The Holy Trinity and Baptism

Matthew 28:16–20

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

Eph 1:2

Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (vv 18–20).

What do the American people believe about God? What do our families, our friends, our neighbors, and our youth believe about God? What do we believe about God? (And don't skate by that question too quickly!)

If you were to take a survey, I expect you would find general agreement—not universal but general—that there's a god of some type out there, and that this god is responsible in some way for creating the world, but you wouldn't find much belief in a god who is directly involved in our lives or interacting with us today. Just a god out there somewhere. He'd be a nice, fuzzy, generic god, on call when you need a listening ear but content to mind his own business the rest of the time. You'd find belief in a god who just wants everyone to get along and be happy and feel better about themselves, more like a kindly old neighbor than anything else. The kind of god who, if you go to him, will hand you a sweet, offer a cliché phrase—like “Now be a good person”—pat you on the head, and send you off.

According to a major survey of religious beliefs among American youth in 2005, this is exactly the kind of god they believed in. I doubt much has changed in fifteen years. In fact, I suspect we all slip and slide into belief of this kind on occasion. It's natural for us human beings to believe vaguely in god, as all human societies have since the beginning of time, but it's not so natural to belief in the true God, the Christian God. A better name for this generic belief-in-God is Deism.

Now I would be *flabbergasted* (and, honestly, overjoyed!) if anyone responded to a survey about religious belief with the words of the Athanasian Creed: “*We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons, nor dividing the substance.*”

That would be great! Or with this praise from today's liturgy: *“Blessèd be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to Him because He has shown His mercy to us.”*

The one true God, the blessed Holy Trinity whom we worship, not this generic deistic “god” out there, but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—He isn't *only* over all things and above all things and way up high (the big word for this is transcendent). He's *also* active, intimately involved, and fully present in the world and in our lives—the word for this is immanent. He actually deals with us *today*. His fingerprints are all over.

His fingerprints are there **in the beginning**, of course, when **God created the heavens and the earth** by His word, out of nothing, in six days, but His fingerprints were *also* there when you were formed and knit together in your mother's womb (Gen 1:1; Ps 139:13). You are **fearfully and wonderfully made**, not by a process of evolution or by chance, but by God, as the psalmist says (Ps 139:14). The footprints of God are stamped across history, starting with the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8), but especially two thousand years ago in the person and work of Jesus Christ. St. Peter, in the Book of Acts, preaches an active, involved God—doing **mighty works and wonders and signs**, with a **definite plan and foreknowledge** of events taking place, who actively keeps His promises. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, came in the flesh and was **crucified and killed**, but God the Father **raised Him up** and **exalted** Him to His right hand as **both Lord and Christ**, and **having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit**, Jesus **poured out** this Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:22–36). The Son of God active in the flesh. God the Father active in raising the Son from the dead. God the Spirit active on Pentecost in creating and forming the Church. I'd say that's a far cry from a nice, fuzzy, generic god who gives you sweets, speaks in clichés, and pats your head when you feel down.

But it still begs the question: What about today? What about right now, in my life and yours? When we look around at the world, we see a world full of man's works, a world stamped by human exploration and human ingenuity and human development, whether good or bad. But where are the Holy Trinity's fingerprints and footprints? Just exactly how is He active? How is my life held and touched by the blessed Holy Trinity, the divine eternal Unity today and tomorrow and in all the days to come?

Christian, just look at the place where Jesus directs you in Matthew 28: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (v 19). If you want to know where the Holy Trinity is and how the Holy Trinity is active, just grab ahold of your baptism. Return to the font, to where you were washed with water and the word. Swim in that stream. You'll see that it's soaked with the power and the work and the presence of the Holy Trinity.

THE HOLY TRINITY—GOD THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT—
IS ALIVE AND ACTIVE IN HOLY BAPTISM.

I don't just mean that the Holy Trinity is active and alive in Holy Baptism when someone is brought to be newly baptized. I mean that the Holy Trinity is active and alive in your baptism still. Your baptism isn't just a past event, not just something that you look at and say, "That was nice." Your baptism brought you into direct contact with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, putting their stamp on your life in a way that remains to this very day.

After rising from the dead but before ascending to heaven, Jesus said to the disciples: **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"** (vv 18–20).

What does it mean to be baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit? Is it just a phrase, a formula, a bunch of words about God and that's it? Throughout the Scriptures, it's clear that wherever God places His name, there He is. The tabernacle in Exodus. The temple in 1 Kings. God said, "I will place My name there." They took Him seriously. It wasn't just a word. It was God's own presence there in the temple. So we confess that through your baptism the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are present and remain and abide with you still. Where His name is—on you!—there He is present to care for you, to love you, to guide you, when needed to rebuke and correct you, and to bless and keep you and load you with His promises. All of that still there in your baptism, even today.

We recall this when we begin our services in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It's like your baptism is being put back on you again. You're being clothed, dressed in your baptism again, remembering who you are and whose you are. In Holy Baptism, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have made you a people for His own possession. *His* people now, because His name is on you. And in your baptism, He has made you new—you are a new creation through water and the word.

Consider what each person of the Holy Trinity has done and is doing in your baptism:

First, God the Father: at your baptism, just as at Christ's baptism, the heavens opened and His voice spoke, **"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"** (Mt 3:17). This is how God sees you. This is what God the Father says about you today:

“You are My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Yes, son! Because He sees you covered with Christ. All your sins forgiven and washed away.

What is God the Son doing in your baptism? You were baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection. This means you were baptized into His victory over sin, death, and the devil. Joined with Christ, you have that! We can even say that Christ now lives in us. And, because He lives in us, we will never die, and even when we die we will live forever with Him.

What about the Holy Spirit? What is He doing in Holy Baptism for you today? He’s taking the holiness that Christ won by His life, death, and resurrection and giving it to you. He makes you holy in Christ, and He keeps you in your baptism, and He promises to raise you up on the last day.

This is where God touches you today. He’s in the water, stirring it around, active, present, living with you, so that you remain His now and forever. So you have what you need for life in this world: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

So you don’t just have a generic “god,” not just a god who is out there, who maybe made you but has left you alone. No, you have a God who is daily and intimately present and active in your life, as active and present as the baptism you live in each day. And He doesn’t just give you a sweet or a pat on the head or a cliché phrase. He says, “You are mine, and I am yours. You have My strong name placed on you to go with you today and tomorrow and every day of your life.”

May God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless and keep you in your baptismal grace, and may we as the baptized bow our heads and bend our knees saying, “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.”

Next time someone asks you about the God you believe, you can say, “*We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons, nor dividing the substance.*” And, when they ask for more, simply invite them to meet this God through baptism in His name—in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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

Phil 4:7
