

Trinity Sunday

II Corinthians 13:5-14, St. Matthew 28:16-20

I. Introduction

You may have heard the story of the Rabbi who was walking down the sidewalk one gloomy, rainy day. He was walking because it was Saturday, the Sabbath, and being devout, he walked home after services through the downpour. Suddenly, a car swerved on the slick pavement and slid up onto the sidewalk, knocking the Rabbi painfully to the ground. The driver, panicked by the whole episode, sped away, hoping no one had seen the accident. As luck would have it, the Rabbi was lying in the front yard of a Church where the priest had been preparing for the services on the following day. The priest had seen the whole thing, and he ran out in the rain and knelt down next to the injured Rabbi and proceeded to give him Last Rites. He carefully cradled the Rabbi's head in his lap and said, "My son, do you believe in God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost?" to which the Rabbi responded, "I'm lying here in the rain, dying, and you're asking me riddles?!"

Are there times when we might agree with the Rabbi, that the Trinity is simply a complicated riddle? Maybe it was good for the Church 1500 years ago, but is it really that important now?

The Church, for almost 700 years, has dedicated a day to the mystery of the Trinity. The Church of England has dedicated the whole Season from this day to the first of Advent to the Trinity. But, of all the major feasts of the

Church, this is the one that is most puzzling. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost all tell the vivid story of the life of our Lord Jesus and the coming of the Holy Ghost to enliven the Church. We can grasp in personal ways, how Jesus lived and walked among people just like us. Pentecost is meaningful to us because each of us was baptized and confirmed, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. Yet, a feast celebrating the Trinity is difficult to get our arms around. Maybe seminarians and theologians should celebrate the feast, but can it really be that important?

II. The Trinity

Did you know that the word "Trinity" never appears in the Bible? Not once. Did you know that there are really only two passages that even mention the three persons of what we call the Trinity together in one place? As it happens, we heard both of them this morning. The first is the epistle lesson from II Corinthians in which St. Paul gives the Church in Corinth his blessing in the name of the three persons of the Trinity. The second reference to the Trinity is from the Gospel according to St. Matthew, given in the context of the Great Commission. There Our Lord commands his disciples to baptize, as we did this past Sunday, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. A total of two verses. Just two! You might expect more evidence for such an important teaching. There is more, but you have to look a bit. It is said that the Old Testament teaches us about the Father, the Gospels teach us about the Son, and the rest of the New Testament teaches us about the work of the Holy Ghost. Since the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came mightily upon the Apostles, the

Church has struggled to understand the mystery of the Trinity.

Who does the Church say God is? God is one. St. Paul says ⁴There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ¹ He is the God who created and sustains the world, and all the creatures in it. He is the one God who is worthy of praise and whom the whole heavens adore. But, wait! God is three! A perfection of three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Each one of them is God. Each one of them is like the other two in power and glory. But, there are not three gods, but one God. The Church proclaims that there are three persons in the Godhead. A perfect example is the *Te Deum*. Sts. Ambrose and Augustine composed this canticle and we still say it at Morning Prayer. In it we find the teaching of the Apostles— The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee; the Father of an infinite majesty; thine adorable, true and only Son; also the Holy Ghost the Comforter.

1. The Father is God. Of the three, no one has ever disputed the Father's divinity. But why do we call the first person the Father? He is a father because he has a son. He is a father because he has many precious children: first, the children of Israel, and now all those who are his children because they have faith in Christ.(Gal. 3:6) He is a father because he protects and provides for his children.

¹*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Eph 4:4-6). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

2. The Son is God. The Apostle Thomas couldn't believe that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. He said that he needed more proof than an empty grave and the testimony of Mary Magdelene. So what did Thomas say when he actually saw and touched Jesus? "My Lord, and my God." We know Jesus to be God in the miracles he performed. We know him to be God because he was able to raise Lazarus from the dead. We know him to be God in his mighty Resurrection and glorious Ascension.

3. The Holy Ghost is God. He is God because he proceeds from the Father to comfort and council the Church. He is God because he does things that only God can do. He was the one that conceived Our Lord in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. He is the one that gives us new life in Christ.

The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Ghost is God. But there are not three Gods, but one God.

III. Why all the fuss?

It is confusing isn't it? It is quite a mystery. Some think that it is really more trouble than it is worth. Consider the Jews and the Muslims. They worship one God without the trouble we have making sense of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Some people say that we all worship the same God anyway! The Muslims are willing to accept Jesus as a great teacher - even a prophet. Why does Jesus have to be God anyway? Everyone agrees he was a very special man. He was kind. He loved little children, and the poor. He was revolutionary in his treatment of women and foreigners. He taught people to care for one another, and be generous with

their money. He taught us to care for others who are in need. He was very religious. He talked about God all the time, and prayed a lot. Isn't that the kind of example we need? Think of what a wonderful world it would be if there were more people that acted like Jesus. People wouldn't hate or kill each other. There would be plenty to eat because everyone would share all the resources of the world.

But the problem is, we won't follow good examples. Think of all the good examples the world has had: Moses, Socrates, Buddha, Mohamed, and Gandhi. We won't follow good examples because we have something called sin. Sin infects our wills so that we don't follow wise advice. Instead of generosity, we try to get everything we can, and hold on to it. Instead of forgiving those who injure us, we become offended, and harbor hatred against them. We need more than a good example. We need a savior. We need someone that can save us from our sins and from the death that accompanies it. We can't do it ourselves. We can't use good advice. We need God to give us new life. If Jesus was just a man, giving us a good example, he is of no use to us. But if Jesus is really God; if he is able to save us from the death of our sins, then he is exactly what we need. As John says, And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.²

The Blessed Trinity is an awesome mystery, but it is here that we can catch a glimpse and gain some understanding.

Before all worlds and all time began, there was God in all his beauty and holiness. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost existed in perfect love and complete community as they were joined in unity. Yet, even then, they in their mercy and pity saw us chained in slavery to our sins, and the Trinity loved us. The thrice holy God did not love us because of anything that we did, but because the three persons of the Trinity are bound together by love – God IS love. God the Father cared for his children that sinned against him. He loved them so much that he sent his only Son to die for them. His Son loved the Father so much that he emptied himself, was made like us, and was obedient to the death of the cross. The Father loved his children so much that he sent his Holy Ghost to dwell in our hearts so that we might love him and be made more like him. The Holy Ghost comforts us, conforms us to the likeness of our Heavenly Father, and gathers us into community with the glorious Trinity.

IV. Conclusion

1. We all know the adage that a picture is worth a thousand words, and this is especially true of icons that are written to express deep religious meaning. One of the most famous icons is by the Russian iconographer, Rublev, depicting the Trinity. The icon reminds us of a story from Genesis. Three angels appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre to announce the birth of his son Isaac. The three persons sit around a table with an air of fellowship and harmony. The Father sits on the left and gazes upon the Son and the Holy Ghost. The Son sits at the table in the center of the icon while the Holy Ghost sits at the right of the table. The Son and the Holy Ghost incline toward the Father, honoring him.

²*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (1 Jn 5:11-12). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Here rest the eternal three at table in loving unity with one another. But these happy three are not all that we can see in the icon. Upon the table is a meal that they are sharing. And there is an empty place at the table just in front of the food. There is an empty place for someone to join in the joyous celebration, occurring between the three persons of the Trinity. For whom was that empty place set? With whom will they keep the feast of joy and thanksgiving? They are waiting for you and for me.

2. The grace of the Mystery

The Rabbi who walked home in the rain that Saturday afternoon, will never be able to answer the priest's riddle, even if he had a hundred lifetimes. The mystery of the Three in One will never be solved. But we must celebrate the feast, and we must proclaim the great salvation, which God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost have won for us. God wants us to know him, and has revealed himself to us in the Holy Scripture and in the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ. But the Father has graciously given us his Holy Ghost and the Sacraments that we might be drawn into the mystery of the Trinity. As we eat and drink the mystery of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord we join in fellowship with the Trinity. The Father invites us as his children to the Great Feast. We have no righteousness of our own to offer, but he gives us the Body and Blood of his own Son to present as a sacrifice. We have no life of our own, but he gives us the vigor and breath of his own Holy Ghost that we might serve him. Let us praise the Almighty, and ever blessed Trinity. AMEN