

8.20.2017 Trinity 10 (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

One Sunday morning, before the offering plate was passed, a pastor explained to his congregation that the church was in need of some extra money. He asked them to please consider being more than generous, and offered to the person who gave the most, the opportunity to pick three hymns. After the plate was passed he found someone had graciously offered a \$1,000 donation. He asked the person to stand up, and an 85 year old woman rose. He thanked her and said, “You may now pick three hymns.” The woman looked over the congregation, found the three most handsome men, and said, “I’ll take him, him, and him!”

If you are a church leader, it’s pretty clear you better choose your words carefully when you address the congregation, and I would suggest to you this morning, that’s exactly what St. Paul does in a letter inspired by God yet written by Paul’s hand to the Church that he established in Corinth (Acts 18:1-17). In this letter, the Epistle we read this morning, St. Paul writes to Christians about diverse spiritual gifts and different kinds of service, and the inspired words concerning these gifts declare this vital truth to the people of God: It is the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God at work in every spiritual blessing. Consider these words from our Epistle: *“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all”* (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

In these verses, we recognize the way Paul carefully uses and emphasizes specific, Trinitarian language. We see that Paul could have simply stated the truth that Almighty God is working in us and through us by these diverse gifts, but he didn’t, and the fact that he didn’t, the fact that he carefully speaks of God the Father, God the

Son, and God the Holy Spirit pushes the doctrine of the Trinity to the front of this conversation about spiritual gifts. Paul speaks carefully to the Church, and we are meant to take notice, so let's consider why the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is such an important aspect of this teaching concerning the diversity of spiritual blessings.

In this fallen world, humanity often views our different gifts as a reason for division. From kids on the playground picking the most gifted athletes for their team, to the endless debate of whether a man or a woman is better suited for a particular task. Everyday people around the world divide into warring factions of men and women, black and white, rich and poor, the mighty and the powerless. A Christian would expect to witness such division in the world, but unfortunately, even in the Church, every day we experience humanity's capacity for division. We have divided the Body of Christ into denominations, and within those denominations people separate themselves, or become those that are separated, often due to how we view our own spiritual gifts and the way in which we respond to the gifts that God has given others.

This appears to be the problem that Paul was addressing in the church at Corinth. It seems that people who had certain gifts were claiming a kind of pre-eminence. In their own minds, or in the minds of some in the Church, these gifts made them special people that were worth more than others, and we witness this in the modern church as well. People with different types of gifts who have claimed these blessings make them better than others. Man looks on the outside, observes differences between himself and others, and then credits himself as though this is his accomplishment. God looks on the heart, and Paul reminds us that the Church is God's creation, and these good and perfect gifts given to the people of God to be used in His Church, are given and sustained by Him. We cannot

glory in spiritual gifts that distinguish us one from another, for Paul tells us that what we are seeing in these things is not our work, but God at work: Father, Son, and Spirit.

The way Paul emphasizes the doctrine of the Holy Trinity points to the truth that diverse gifts given by a Triune God are not intended to divide His people. There is no division in the Persons of the Trinity, and there is no room for division in the Church. Almighty God is an eternal, perfect communion of three distinct Persons. The Father is not the Son, for it was the Father who sent His Son. The Son is not the Spirit, for it was the Son, and He alone, that took on human form (Philippians 2:7) and obediently carried out the will of the Father. The Spirit is not the Father, for it was the Spirit that prepared the body of Jesus (Matthew 1:20, Luke 1:35), led Him into the wilderness (Luke 4:1), and through the Spirit our Lord offered Himself on the Cross at Calvary (Hebrews 9:14). The Persons of the Holy Trinity are distinct in relation to each other, but never divided, for each of the three Persons possesses the same eternal and infinite divine nature. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. The One true God is a communion of three distinct Persons, a community in which the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father.

The fact that God is a communion of three Persons is the foundation of our calling to live in unity with one another, for we are created in God's *image and likeness* (Genesis 1:27). We are persons loved and made by God to mirror Him, and when we exercise our diverse spiritual gifts to love and bless one another, to enter into a more perfect union and communion with one another, we shine brighter and we more accurately reflect our Triune God. This is the life we are called to as Christians. In the Gospel of John, Jesus prays what is referred to as His "High Priestly Prayer." In this prayer, as our High Priest, Jesus prays to the Father asking that all who follow Him

might be united, with the intent that we would share, as brothers and sisters in Christ, a type of that union and communion that defines His relationship with the Father (John 17:20-21). Through the prayer of the Son to the Father, by the power of the Spirit, our lives on this earth, our lives in His Church, can be transformed into an echo of that Triune heavenly community. Living in unity with one another is a fundamental aspect of our example and our witness to the world, for in His prayer, Jesus said that it was His desire that through Christian unity *“the whole world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me”* (John 17:23).

It is the desire of our Lord and Savior, that through our unity, the *whole world* may know that God sent His Son. When we use our diverse spiritual gifts to unite the Church, like a body with many members we accomplish great things, like a vine with many branches we bear much fruit. Those things we accomplish, and that fruit we bear, draws the world to Christ. We are Christians, and are called to take up our cross and follow the example of our Savior. Our Savior, who took all that He has and all that He is and used it for our good. He employed every spiritual gift to walk the path that led to the Cross, to pay for our sins and rescue us from the bands of those sins, the sting of death, and the separation from God that is pure hell. Jesus did all of that for us, and from the Cross cried out: *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30). It is finished! You are saved! (Ephesians 2:8) Now, use your diverse gifts to live in Christian unity and godly love, to the end that the world may know, that God sent His Son.