

6.15.2025 Trinity Sunday (The One, True, Personal God)

Our sermon hymn this morning, which is found in the section titled *Hymns for Children*, provides us with a simple description of the Church year. This hymn lists many of the major feast days - Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, the Ascension, Pentecost, and finally, the feast we celebrate today, Trinity Sunday. When we think of these feast days, it's interesting to note that the feast we celebrate this morning is distinctly different than the others listed in the hymn. You may have noticed the other feasts mentioned are historic events, or days in the life of the Church. The birth of our Lord on Christmas Day, the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles on Epiphany, the Resurrection on Easter Day, the Ascension of our Lord on a particular day, and the Holy Ghost being poured out on the Church on the Day of Pentecost. All of these feasts mark a particular moment in Church history, but the feast we celebrate this morning is not a day or a moment, it's a doctrine.

Trinity Sunday is a feast day unlike the rest, and this difference presents a challenge for pastors and ministers. This morning, instead of simply focusing on what God accomplished on a particular day through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord, many will view this feast as a time that must be used to explain one of the most inexpressible mysteries of the Christian faith, and this shift from celebrating a day to explaining a doctrine, often leads to heretical analogies and strange math.

We've probably all heard the analogy that would have us believe the Trinity is like water in its three forms: liquid, vapor, and ice, but that's the heresy of modalism - that God is not three distinct Persons, but merely reveals Himself in three forms. There's also the analogy that the Trinity is like the sun: God the Father as the star, God the Son as the light, and God the Holy Spirit as the heat, but this is the heresy of Arianism - the heresy that the Son and the Spirit are creations of the Father and not equally one in nature with Him. There's also another analogy often attributed, without evidence, to St. Patrick, which says that he used a shamrock, a three-leaved clover to explain the Trinity, but that would be the heresy called partialism - a heresy that views the Father, Son, and Spirit not as distinct Persons which are each fully God, but are parts of God, each comprising one-third of the Divine.

Finite creatures fail when we try to use analogies to explain the infinite God, and reducing the Trinity to a strange math equation in which $1+1+1=1$ doesn't offer a solution either. I came across a quote from Eugene Peterson that explains that truth well. He wrote, "A Trinitarian vision prevents the "one" God from being defined mathematically, the living God from being reduced to a lifeless number. Numbers are language at its most abstract and impersonal. Numbers are unsurpassed in dealing with anything impersonal—machines and planets and money markets—but they're virtually useless in dealing with persons, and less than useless as a language about God. So we don't understand the Trinity by working with numbers, puzzling over how one equals three or three equals one. The Trinity has nothing to do with arithmetic. The Trinity is the church's way of learning to think and respond relationally to God as He reveals himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is triply personal, emphatically personal, unrelentingly personal."

On this feast day we must not fall into the trap of thinking that the Trinity is a problem to be solved, because that leads to the kind of heretical analogies and strange math that completely miss the trinitarian point that Eugene Peterson expressed perfectly - that God is personal. Today is a time to celebrate the way the Church has given us to learn and think and "respond relationally to God as He reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The good news of Trinity Sunday, the reason to celebrate, is the comforting truth that God is not only personal, but again in Peterson's words, God is "triply personal, emphatically personal, unrelentingly personal." This is the heart of Christianity, and our "triply personal" God is what distinguishes the Christian faith from every other world religion. Therefore, bad analogies and strange math have no place in our celebration. Instead, on Trinity Sunday we celebrate the One, True God, as He has revealed Himself to us, in three Divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Consider the truth that God the Father is personal, and notice once more that if we were to use a bad analogy, we would quickly be led away from personal language. The common analogies speak of water in three forms, the sun accompanied by light and heat, and a three-leafed clover, but let me ask you, are any of these things personal? For example, can water, like a person, love? Can the sun, a star in the sky, show compassion? Can you enter into a

relationship with a clover? You see, heretical analogies lead us away from the One, True, personal God, yet though we err and stray, God continually draws us to Himself. He makes Himself known personally. Holy Scripture reminds us, and our own experience informs us, that the attributes of God are those of a Divine Person. God is wise (Romans 11:33) and faithful (2 Timothy 2:13), He is good and kind (Psalm 34), God is merciful (Romans 9:15-16), gracious (Psalm 145:8), and loving (1 John 4:7-8), and if these personal attributes weren't enough, it's striking to consider that our Savior Christ speaks of God not only as personal, but as a Father - over 165 times in the Gospels. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, is personal.

Now, consider the truth that God the Son is personal. Throughout our Lord's life here on this earth examples of that fact abound, beginning with the Incarnation. In his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul tells us that "*by Him (Christ) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...*" (Colossians 1:16), and therefore we know that our Lord, as the Creator, could have chosen any number of ways to clothe Himself in human flesh, to take on a human nature, but He didn't choose any number of ways, He chose the most personal way. The Angel Gabriel visited the Blessed Virgin Mary, she said, "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word*" (Luke 1:38), and by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the creature's womb the Creator, "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14).

God the Son reached out to the world, personally and physically, in human flesh. The Gospels are filled with examples of Jesus touching people like us, and being touched by them. On the raging sea, He took Peter by the hand and lifted him up (Matthew 14:31), and when Peter's mother in law was sick, Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up as well (Mark 1:31). He touched a blind man and restored his sight (Mark 8:23). He touched a man who was deaf and mute, and "*immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly*" (Mark 7:35). Jesus touched a leper, and the leper was cured (Matthew 8:3). He touched a dead little girl, and she arose (Luke 8:41-56).

Do you wonder what it must've been like to be touched by our Lord and God, or like St. Augustine, do you recognize that when we receive the Sacrament

of Holy Communion we are touched by Him. Writing about the consecrated bread we receive - the Body of our Lord, and speaking of the Last Supper, Augustine stated, "Christ held Himself in His hands when He gave His Body to His disciples saying: 'This is My Body.'" The Eucharist is more than a symbol, it is the Body and Blood of our Lord. At the Lord's Table we commune personally with the Risen Christ. We are touched by Him.

Consider the truth that God the Holy Spirit is personal. The actions and attributes of the Spirit, experienced in our daily lives and described in Scripture, are those of a Person, not an impersonal force. As we learned last week on the Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit acts as our Comforter, Advocate, Helper, Teacher, and Guide. In the Gospel reading from last Sunday Jesus said, *"I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you"* (John 14:16-17). On Trinity Sunday, note that the Son prays to the Father, and the Father sends the Holy Spirit, and recognize the personal language that our Lord used to describe the Spirit. Jesus said the world can't receive the Spirit because the world doesn't see Him, or know Him, but Christian, you know Him, for He dwells with you, and He is in you.

A few verses later, Jesus tells His disciples that the Holy Ghost, a Divine Person, *"He shall teach you all things..."* (John 14:26), and elsewhere in Scripture we learn that the Holy Spirit can be grieved, that the Spirit speaks to us, guides us, and intercedes for us. All of these qualities are personal, and again, our "triple personal, emphatically personal, unrelentingly personal" God is who we celebrate on Trinity Sunday.

We try, especially on Trinity Sunday, but human illustrations will never accurately describe the indescribable God, and human experience will never completely comprehend the mysteries of God. Therefore, we shouldn't view the Holy Trinity as a problem to be solved. Instead, we should give thanks that the One, True, Personal God calls His people, His children, to enter into this Holy Mystery of love. In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul speaks of God adopting us *"into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 1:5), and the family into which we are adopted is

the Trinity. God has invited us into His house, He has set the Table, and through the Body and Blood of His Son we commune with the Eternal Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. No human analogy could ever unfold this mystery, or explain such amazing grace.