

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

*Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to Him because He has shown His mercy to us.*

Today, we celebrate the Festival of the Holy Trinity with its recitation of the Athanasian Creed. And though some may moan a bit about reciting this long and rather pedantic creed as we did on this day, it seems more necessary to me for the church as a whole in our modern times to celebrate the day, as large swaths of Evangelicalism have become, by their own admission, “functionally Unitarian.”

The early church didn’t celebrate this 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost as a festival, citing the fact that daily the worship of the church honored the Holy Trinity. Our own liturgy reflects this Trinitarian emphasis with introits and psalms and canticles often concluding with a *Gloria Patri*, “*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit*,” etc., with a three fold *Kyrie*, with ancient collects that are addressed to God the Father terminating with, “*through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever*,” with Trinitarian invocations, “*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*,” and three-fold benedictions, “*The Lord bless you ... The Lord make His face shine upon you ... The Lord lift up His countenance upon you ...*,” with the thoroughly Trinitarian *Sanctus*, that comes from Isaiah’s vision in our Old Testament lesson today, but that we sing each week as part of our communion liturgy, etc.

Nevertheless, as a festival of the church, it began in the twelfth century to be celebrated on the Sunday following Pentecost, and that practice spread quickly throughout the Western Church. And indeed, that we celebrate Holy Trinity as a festival and in our regular worship shows the world that this is not just some dry and overly academic teaching of the church, and therefore irrelevant to our lives. No! The Holy Trinity is the One True God, the God presented to us by revelation of the Holy Scriptures, the God whom we worship, the God from whom all blessings flow.

And yet, while on most Sundays we simply swim in Trinitarian waters, on this Sunday, it seems appropriate to address some basic questions about the God of the Bible, for the cultural waters we swim in on the other days want to sweep us away into Unitarianism by lumping us all together with phrases like, “the great monotheistic religions,” or “the Abrahamic faiths,” or by prohibiting sectarian prayers, they call them, made to God the Father through Jesus Christ, His Son, etc.

So today we ask, “*Who is the true God?*” And “*so what?*” For, indeed, there may be a greater danger than those who want to smooth over the differences

among these major world religions. How often have you heard people say to you, “*I can’t believe in a God who is so...*” or “*My God would not be so ...*” etc.? So what? So judgmental or cruel as to condemn those who try their best. So narrow-minded as to limit salvation to only those who know and trust in Jesus Christ. So unloving as to forbid two people’s love in a same-sex marriage or deny a woman’s vocational aspirations to become a pastor or priest?

Such people often conclude that therefore they don’t believe in god. Of course, they’re fooling themselves—for that’s what a fool says in his heart. The truth is, though, that they do have a god or gods; their god ends up being and thinking and feeling just like they do; that is, he ends up being themselves. And as gods go, that is a figment of their imagination. That is a god that is not real, for He’s not the God of the Bible, the God who both “*kills and brings to life,*” who “*brings down to Sheol and raises up*” (1 Samuel 2:6). The true God is a jealous God, who condemns unbelief and punishes sin. The true God is the Lord who pronounced the death sentence on Adam and Eve, who banished Cain, who destroyed the earth by water, who confused the languages and scattered the people. The true God is the Lord who ordered the destruction of idolaters, who sent poisonous vipers to complaining Israel, who struck fear into the prophet Isaiah’s soul and put the words of “*woe*” on His lips. The Lord did these things. THEIR god would never have done these things, but then again their god isn’t real. The REAL God did them — all these things.

Surely we all struggle with this problem I’ve been talking about. How many of you have sought to justify sinful thoughts and acts, saying, “*God wouldn’t want me to be unhappy*”? Admit it. We want a god who thinks and acts as we do, who doesn’t demand but merely approves of every decision we make, good or bad. But that God is make-believe.

Repent! The Lord is the real God who says “*My ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts.*” God does not play by our rules. He is not just a bigger version of us. He is wholly different. We cannot make demands of Him. We are not His counselor, as St. Paul reminds us: “*For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?*” We have not given to Him or done anything for Him that He should heed us— “*Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?*”

No, God’s ways are deeper and broader and higher than anything that we can conceive—mysterious beyond our comprehension. Let us, therefore, repent of our desire to remake God into us, and then let us simply rejoice in the Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth that we do have, for the difference between us and Him is immense, in His being and in His ways. “*Oh, the depth of the riches and*

*wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*” And when St. Paul sings this doxology, it’s not in the context of explaining the mystery of the Holy Trinity or extoling His majesty or holiness. Rather, it’s in the context of His showing mercy! *“Let us give glory to Him because He has shown His mercy to us.”*

This is the Holy Triune God — the God of the Bible whom angels and archangels and all the company of heaven worship — and we join in their worship. He is the real God. He is the Lord, *“a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”* He is the God who saves.

For it’s true, we can’t know the depths of God—of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, of His three-in-oneness—but we can know something of Him. We can know what He has revealed to us in His Word. And what does this Word say? It says that God is not only the one who is just, but the one who justifies—through the Son. For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.

This is the essence, this is the very character of God—love, and that love is expressed in a Trinitarian way. Love is what God wishes to give to the world—not condemnation, but grace through the Son. He loves the world in the gift of His Son. The Son descends from the Father at the Father’s behest. The Son is delivered up according to the Father’s plan set before the world was even made. The Son is lifted up, offered up, raised up to give the world forgiveness and life and salvation.

And then being exalted at the right hand of God, He loves yet more. He keeps His promise. He sends the Holy Spirit, that through preaching, and the washing of rebirth by water and the Spirit, you might *“know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus [who was] crucified,”* and so be forgiven of your sins, that you might *“confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead”* and so be saved, that you might believe in Him, and so not perish but have everlasting life.

You can see, this is no mere scholastic exercise on this Trinity Sunday. This is your life. This is a call to cast off your idols, and worship the one true God. This is a call to live your life planted firmly by the streams of Holy Trinitarian waters. And well, yesterday’s service for our sister in Christ, Anne, (and so it will be for sister Alice this week) a service steeped in Trinitarian references, the invocation, baptism, the singing of “Holy, Holy, Holy”—which we will do today, but that was Anne’s favorite hymn, the Gloria Patri’s, etc., is an example of how we do this. It reminded us a life begun, continued, and ended, in this catholic faith we hold, and in the Holy Trinity that we worship. For this is the catholic faith: *“that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing*

*the substance.*” This is the faith believed faithfully and firmly whereby we are saved.

So we believe; so we teach; so we confess; so we worship; so we live.  
*“Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to Him because He has shown His mercy to us.”*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.