

HOLY TRINITY

Genesis 1:1-2:3; 2 Corinthians 13:11-14; Matthew 28:16-20

One God, three Persons; three Persons, one God

It's a beautiful Saturday afternoon. You're about to go outside to play with the kids. You think you hear someone talking on your sidewalk. You discretely peek out the blinds. "Uh oh, honey, hit the lights, grab the kids, and make sure to stay low. They're here. [Crouch behind the pulpit.]" Knock, knock, knock. You peek again. There they are, smiling, holding books, dressed in shirt and tie. You wait them out. Eventually they leave. You hug the wife and kids. "That was close," she says. "Yeah, too close," you reply.

Did I lose you, or have you been there, in a less dramatic fashion of course? Most of us have opened the door at least once. They looked nice enough. Maybe you even let them in. And then next thing you know your guests are telling you that Jesus isn't really God and the only real name for God is Jehovah and lucky for you they're His witnesses.

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday. Does that mean anything to you? In addition to being the only Sunday of the Church Year we confess the Athanasian Creed, or "the long one" as it's also known, it's also the Sunday we have the special opportunity to review the teaching of the Holy Trinity, the God in whose name we gather, minister, and have our being.

So what do you remember about the Holy Trinity? It's what of those teachings that are hard to wrap your heads around, precisely because it is a teaching about the God who is never going to fit in your head. He's a big God, you know, not made with human hands, not the figment of human imagination, but the Hand, the Mind, the Reason behind all that has life and breath.

So why did I start with Jehovah's Witnesses knocking at your door? Because they are one of many groups in our day, some even claiming to be Christian, that will tell you that the Bible doesn't teach the Holy Trinity. And not only that, but they will catch the unsuspecting or uncatechized Christian by surprise, because they have a pretty powerful opener. They will ask you, "Do you know that the word 'trinity' isn't found anywhere in the Bible?" And the unsuspecting or uncatechized will say, "Sure it is," and then they will proceed to search the Bible with them, and the unsuspecting or uncatechized will be cast into doubt and wonder, "Well, if my pastors lied to me about this, what else did they lie to me about?" And then their only a step away from being on the other side of the door, on another poor sap's doorstep, carrying a load of books, smiling in shirt and tie.

Guess what? The word "trinity" is not in the Bible. And no pastor has ever told you it is. But the fact that the word "trinity" is not in the Bible does not mean the teaching isn't. That is where our lessons and others like them come in today. The teaching of the Holy Trinity, the *teaching* of the Holy Trinity, runs throughout Scripture. But because it is hard to explain in a few and in simple words, the Church came up with a way to describe it in fewer and more simple words: Holy Trinity. Tertullian was the first to come up with the term. It's Latin. It means "Three in One." Our God is three Persons—Tertullian also coined that term—in one Godhead. One God, three Persons. Three Persons, one God. Are you doing the math in your head? Hard to wrap your head

around it, isn't it? But that's where we come back to the thing about God not fitting in your head, nor should you want Him to, because then you'd have one small god.

Those of you who read your Bibles know we have anything but a small God. Ever since the beginning He's been doing some pretty big things, like creating something out of nothing, like creating our human race with the breath of His mouth and some dirt. *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'"* we read a few moments ago, and those listening carefully would have to say, "What?" Notice God doesn't say "Let me," but "Let us." One God is speaking, but He says, "Let us," almost as if there were more than one Person in this Godhead. Who'd a thunk?

And that continues throughout the Old Testament, from the moment the Father speaks the world into existence through the Son as the Spirit hovers over the great deep to the moment the Spirit hovers over the Son's waters of Baptism as the Father speaks from heaven His approval of this One who through His death and resurrection, through Baptism and the preaching of the Word has come to make all things new, to make you a new creation, and so on and so forth all the way to the Book of Revelation.

In the second lesson St. Paul gives us what we call the Apostolic Blessing, *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* Ready for some Greek? Tough. I paid too much to learn it not to show it off once in a while. The term "Lord" used here for Christ is a divine name, a name of God. It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Jehovah," or "Yahweh" depending on who's pronouncing it. It is the name God used with Moses when God told him, *"I am who I am."* The Apostle is here calling on all three Persons of the one true God to do the work most often associated with each Person of the Trinity in the life of the Corinthian congregation. The Son brings the grace, the undeserved love of His suffering and death. The Father showers the love that gave the Son and gives every good and perfect gift. The Spirit brings them into communion with God and with one another through the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Trinity—all three Persons of the one God working together for the Corinthians.

And the same three Persons of the same Holy Trinity works together for you. Jesus says in our Holy Gospel, *"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."* In St. John's Gospel, right before this, Jesus had breathed on them—the word for breath is the same as Spirit in the Bible, and the Spirit is often associated with breath, as God breathed spirit into Adam, and as now Jesus breathes Spirit onto His disciples—and He said to them, *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* And He did send them, and with them He who was sent by the Father sent His Spirit, so that as they baptized and taught disciples were born, and are born still today, so that you, the baptized, are gathered to be taught yet again, striving to learn all that our Lord has commanded.

As Father, Son, and Spirit worked together as the one true God to create the universe and to make man in His image, so also the Father, Son, and Spirit have worked together to make you a new creation and are working together to renew you in His image. Our God is a God of Persons, of family, of society. And so are we. We are not alone. We are part of a family, the family of God,

of a society, the Holy Christian Church, united not only with one another, but with the Holy Trinity Himself.

You are loved beyond compare. You are jars of clay being reformed in the very likeness of the Almighty. Sometimes there are going to be lumps. Sometimes you are going to get all bent out of shape. But those are the times to remember that while the word "trinity" is not in the Bible, the Holy Trinity most certainly is, and He is eager to mend you, to renew you, to bring you closer to Himself. What a wonderful teaching this is. What a wonderful God we have. Don't forget that next time you hear the invocation at the beginning of the service, or close your prayers in His most holy Name. We have a Father who loves us, a Son who redeems us, a Spirit who makes us holy. That may not put you on your neighbor's doorstep or in shirt and tie, but it sure ought to make you smile. Amen.