

All About God
Trinity Sunday
June 4, 2023

“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.”

Dear friends in Christ,

Trinity Sunday is the one Sunday in the whole year which is devoted to a celebration of God. That may sound a little strange, for every Sunday we gather to worship God and receive His message of Law and Gospel. But on this special Sunday the church focuses our attention specifically on the true God, the Triune God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When we consider God, the first question that comes to mind is: How do we come to know about God in the first place? How do we come to know that there is a God? How do we gain a knowledge of who He is and what He is like? Where does that knowledge come from? What is the source of our knowledge of God? There are really only two possible sources of knowledge about God. Our knowledge of God can either come from our own minds and imaginations, or else it has to be revealed to us. Let's look for a few minutes at both of those options.

The “natural knowledge of God” is the knowledge that comes to us as our senses observe the world around us – the things we see, hear, touch and smell – our observations of nature.

St. Paul speaks about this “natural knowledge of God” in his letter to the Romans where he writes in chapter 1 that “God’s wrath is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them...For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse”.

There is no excuse, Paul is saying, for not knowing and worshipping God. The only way you can deny that there is a God is by **suppressing** the truth that is revealed so very clearly in the creation of this world. When the Psalmist looks at the world around him, he exclaims with great wonder: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge...How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures...”

The natural knowledge of God is not limited to what we can observe from nature around us. When we look within ourselves we also see evidence of the existence of God. That evidence is our conscience. Why would there be such a thing as conscience, troubling us when we have done wrong, keeping us awake at night, if there were no higher authority to whom we are held accountable? This is Paul’s argument a little later on in Romans when he says: “When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness.” The fact that even those who do not believe in God will obey the law’s requirements shows that God’s law is written in their hearts. Although the full revelation of

God's holy law is hidden from them, they nevertheless possess sufficient knowledge of what is right and what is wrong to know that there is a God to whom they are responsible. Therefore, even though God's holy law was not revealed to them, they will establish laws for themselves and even suffer the pangs of conscience when they are guilty of breaking such laws. The fact that unbelievers will establish laws and feel the accusation of a guilty conscience should be sufficient proof that there is a God to whom all are held accountable.

Now, although all mankind possesses a natural knowledge of God through the creation of the world and through the establishment of laws, and through conscience, such knowledge of God is really inadequate for truly knowing Him. How could our small finite minds ever conceive of or fully comprehend an infinite God? Any god that we could conceive would in fact, be a god of our own making and subject to our own reasoning. He would be a god made in our image and by our imagination rather than the other way around.

Even more significant is the fact that by nature we are spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God. Because our disobedience and rebellion against God we have lost the perfect image and knowledge of God which had been given to our first parents, Adam and Eve. Now we are blinded by sin. We have no heart for God. By nature our desire is not to serve and obey him, but to turn away from Him, doing what pleases ourselves instead.

If our own minds are incapable of comprehending the true God through nature and conscience, there remains only one other possibility about our knowledge of God. God must be revealed to us. Someone must tell us about Him, who He is and what He is like. In fact, God has revealed Himself to us through the Scriptures. In the Bible we learn about the true God. You might say that the Bible is just the writings of men, but when you read the Bible you will know that these were not ordinary men who wrote the Bible. They were men of faith who wrote under the inspiration of God. So the Bible is truly the Word of God, Himself — His message and self-revelation to mankind.

When we look at God's Word we learn things that nature and conscience cannot tell us about God. For one thing we learn that there is only one God. In the ancient world, using a natural knowledge of God, people had erected for themselves many gods, images of animals or people whom they worshiped as god. They believed that each nationality had a god and that there were gods that controlled wind, rain, fertility and growing, and many other things.

You've heard the word "pandemonium". That's two Greek words meaning "all demons". In the year 27 B.C., a magnificent circular structure was built and given the name "Pantheon", which means "all gods". Its purpose was to unite the conquered peoples of the Roman Empire by providing a central place for all their gods. In 120 A.D. the Pantheon was reconstructed by Emperor Hadrian. When Christians were offered a niche for a statue of Jesus, they replied, "Never! Jesus cannot stand beside gods that are not true gods."

There's a post script to that story. In 609 A.D. the Pantheon became a Christian church. A British lecturer relates that years later when he visited the Pantheon church, he found that all the niches around the wall were empty except one. That one contained a statue of Jesus.

There is only one God. That was the fervent belief of the children of Israel. While other nations were arguing over whose god was the best or strongest, and while people worshipped their man-made gods of nature, the people of Israel said: "There is only one God. He is the one who made all things and all people should worship Him alone. This God wanted to be known to His people, so he revealed himself to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob and then to Moses and Joshua and Samuel and David and Solomon and then to the prophets who spoke God's word faithfully to the people. This is the one God who calls people to believe in Him and follow Him daily by faith.

When you look to the Bible to learn what God is like, you discover that God has certain attributes or characteristics. God is a spirit, that is, a personal being without a body. God is eternal, unchangeable, almighty, all knowing. He is present everywhere. God is holy and just. He is faithful and good and merciful and gracious. And God is love. God's attributes tell us what God is. He is each of these, all of these and more than these attributes.

One of the marvelous things that we discover about God in the Bible is that, while God is one, He is at the same time three-in-one, or Triune. Now, it's true that the word Triune never appears in the pages of the Bible. But the concept is very clearly there. For example, take today's Old Testament Lesson, the creation of the world. God the Father, uncreated, almighty, eternal, without beginning and without end issues forth the creative command: "Let there be". The preincarnate, word of God, the Divine Logos, the second person of the Holy Trinity is that word spoken by the Father. He is the active agent by which creation is accomplished, the almighty Word of God. That's why St. John says in the first chapter of his Gospel that "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made..." God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, is also present at the creation of the world as we are told: "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters".

The Bible's teaching is that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. To the Father is ascribed the work of Creation and preservation of the world. God did not abandon His creation, but continues to uphold creation and provide for our needs, even as a good father will protect and provide for his family. The symbol that is often seen for God the Father, therefore, is an open hand — giving and providing for his children.

The Bible's teaching is that God the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity is also true God. Of the same essence as the Father, God the Son, the active agent of creation in the beginning, in time became incarnate — born in the flesh — son of the Virgin Mary. St. John says: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." And from that time on this second person of the Trinity has another purpose — to be our Savior from sin, death and the power of the devil. For this reason, the work ascribed to the second person of the Holy Trinity is the work of Redemption.

That Jesus was a man is hardly questioned by people today. There is ample evidence to the fact of his existence as a man living in Palestine at the beginning of the first millennium. But the claim that Jesus Christ is true God is questioned by many. And yet, the Biblical writers had no doubt whatsoever. They ascribed to Jesus attributes which God alone can possess: He is eternal, without beginning and without end. He is unchangeable, almighty, all-knowing and present everywhere. In today's Gospel Jesus said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...And surely I

am with you always, to the very end of the age.” In addition to possessing divine attributes, Jesus does divine works which only God can do. He forgives sins, He created all things, He will judge all people, He preserves creation. He healed the sick, calmed the storm, raised people from the dead and rose Himself victorious over death and the grave. Jesus Christ truly is God.

The Bible also teaches that God the Holy Spirit is true God. Even as he hovered over the waters at creation, so he hovers over God’s people today — calling them to faith and sustaining them in the faith. By the Holy Spirit’s power we are sanctified, having been given the merits of our Savior’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. And by the Holy Spirit’s power we grow to lead sanctified lives in this world. So the work ascribed to the Holy Spirit is called Sanctification.

So from the Bible we can clearly see that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet there are not three Gods, but one. God is one in two ways. He is one in essence or Being. No person of the Holy Trinity is inferior to the other. All are almighty, all are uncreated. The Athanasian Creed, one of the great ancient confessions of our faith, says it this way: “We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance...In this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another; but the whole three persons are coeternal together and coequal, so that in all things the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped.”

In addition to being one in essence, God is also one in purpose. God the Father creates and sustains his creation. God the Son, by his suffering, death and resurrection, has redeemed this fallen world and has atoned for the sins of all mankind. God the Holy Spirit convicts us of the truth of our sin and convinces us of the truth of the Gospel, calling us to faith and sustaining our faith day by day. The purpose of the Holy Trinity is ultimately our eternal Salvation. How perfectly the Trinity has worked and is working still to accomplish this great and wonderful goal. May we always rejoice and give thanks to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit for who He is and all that He has accomplished for our salvation. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.