

The Trinity: The God of Jesus

Trinity Sunday Year C 2019 SSP

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5; St. John 16:5-15

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Almost every sermon here follows the old custom invoking the full name of God as revealed by Jesus Christ; that is the Holy and Undivided Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (or Spirit). Far from being merely a doctrine in the creeds, the Holy and Undivided Trinity is the unfathomable mystery of God's very life and being.

I do not mean to diminish the importance of the Church's creed, by no means. I will get to that briefly. But first and foremost we need to appreciate the fact that the Trinity is not some man-made or church-invented construct, dated centuries after the simple Gospel of Jesus was first preached. Far from it. The Holy and Undivided Trinity is, simply, the true and living God taught and revealed by Jesus, as in today's Gospel according to Saint John and in other places too many to recount in a homily.

One of the most striking contributions of Jesus of Nazareth to the knowledge of God is his constant use of the word *Abba*, Father. You can count on your fingers the number of times God the Lord is called or likened to a father in the enormous Old Testament collection of Scripture. But in the Gospels alone, **God is directly named Abba, Father 170 times, principally on the lips of Jesus himself.** And we haven't counted the rest of the New Testament. This is very striking.¹

Secondly, **Jesus spoke and acted as though he were in the place of God.** It got him into trouble. The evil spirits seemed to appreciate the divinity of Christ more than his

¹ Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, pp. 29ff. This is a little masterpiece of scholarship.

followers did. The opponents and enemies of Jesus, similarly, seemed to grasp the import of his speech and acts as much as or even more than his disciples; except, instead of following him, they condemned him for blasphemy (or demonic possession, or madness). “Who is this, who forgives sins?” His teaching of the Kingdom of God made them suppose he was thinking of himself as its King (or the King’s Son). His miracles, far from convincing his adversaries of his goodness and union with God, drove them to a murderous frenzy. Jesus did not go around saying, “I am God”; but the cumulative effect of his words and deeds, together with his own confessions when put on the spot, are overwhelming. And so it was, on Easter, when Jesus appeared to Saint Thomas after his Resurrection, that the former Doubter made the highest confession of faith in the New Testament: “My Lord and my God!”

Thirdly, Jesus, as we see in today’s Gospel, spoke of his going away, and of his sending from the Father the *Paraclete*, the Holy Spirit, to be the Person of God in his place, to empower his Church and to guide it into all truth. “He (the Holy Spirit) will take what is mine and give it to you. This means that the disciples were no longer to be, as it were, that inward-looking circle we mentioned last Sunday, gathered around the incarnate and then crucified/risen, body of Jesus. When Jesus ascended to the Father, sending the Holy Spirit in his place, that circle was turned inside out: The disciples were filled with the Spirit to preach and live the Gospel to the ends of the earth and through the ages of time until now, and here, on George Street in Providence.

What is most important to realize is that as the Spirit came to the Church, those disciples were transformed into the bold members and witnesses of the Body of Christ. They entered the Kingdom of God preached by Christ, lived by its principles, and

enjoyed its life. In a word, **they were drawn into very life of God the Holy and Undivided Trinity.** They were moved by the Spirit. They were made members of the family of the King's Son; they became his adopted brothers and sisters, members of Christ's body and bride, Holy Mother Church; and finally, they prayed with confidence, "*Abba, Father*", as God's redeemed sons and daughters.

Now a word about doctrine. Doctrine is to the Gospel literature as grammar is to language. If our grammar deteriorates, our ability to speak, communicate and understand is corrupted until, at last, we speak nonsense. This is why the Church has her creeds. They define and summarize the Good News of Jesus about God. If you want to learn more about them, after I'm done with our Bible Study on Acts, I'm starting a Christian Doctrine Class. For now, suffice it to say that the doctrine of the Trinity places in balanced tension the two great truths of Holy Scripture. First, that there is but one living and true God. Second, that the Gospel of Jesus has revealed this God as three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And these two great truths arise because Jesus Christ reveals existential Good News about the nature of God; namely, that the Holy and Undivided Trinity is self-sacrificial, almighty Love. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. And that means that God loves me. I and me here are explicitly plural as in Jesus loves us, this we know, for the Bible tells us so. Little ones to him belong; we are weak but he is strong.

In the meantime, let us believe and realize that we live and breathe in the Holy and Undivided Trinity, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me finish with an ancient Celtic rune from the Scottish Highlands, a preface to prayer. I use it myself frequently

before I start my own Morning Prayer Office. We might think of some of these words today as we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion.

“I am bending my knee

In the eye of the Father who created me,

In the eye of the Son who purchased me,

In the eye of the Spirit who cleansed me,

In friendship and affection.

Through thine own Anointed One, O God,

Bestow upon us fullness in our need,

Love towards God,

The affection of God,

The smile of God,

The wisdom of God,

The grace of God,

The fear of God,

And the will of God

To do on the world of the Three,

As angels and saints do in heaven;

Each shade and light,

Each day and night,

Each time in kindness,

Give Thou us thy Spirit.²

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

² *Celtic Invocations*, Alexander Carmichael, “Rune Before Prayer,” p. 37.