

Saint Thomas' Church  
Trinity Sunday  
June 15, 2019  
rmcneely+

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Ghost

We have spent the last 6 months together walking in the sandals of Jesus.

From His Birth  
To a brief stop when He was 12 years old.  
To His Baptism and this three year Earthly ministry  
The sermons, the miracles, the healings,  
the feedings and the resurrections from the dead  
To His Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension  
And last week to the fulfillment of His promise  
The institution of the Holy Ghost and  
the creation of the Church.  
It is a glorious story and 6 months study.

But today we begin the Trinity Season.  
This year 23 weeks long.  
23 weeks during which we will explore the basic doctrines of the Church.

The things that a Christian must know  
In order to lead a Christian life.  
It is a stimulating, interesting and challenging endeavor that will lead and bring us closer to God than ever before.

The Trinity Season begins with the review of its name sake:  
Trinity.

So today I take on the daunting task of summarizing the Trinity for you.

The Trinity is central to Christianity and the doctrine that is ours alone among the great world religions.

It is a tough one to get your head around if you ask of the how and the why.

The Trinity has been the subject of thought among the greatest of Christian thinkers since the second century.

Probably the most thorough work was done by Augustine of Hippo

Who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries

In what is now Algeria.

Augustine wrote a 30 volume work on the Trinity

It took him 15 years to write it.

He was constantly revising and rewriting it

and may not have considered it finished when he died.

He tells a story about a time he was blocked.

His mind and intellect were exhausted and frozen

From the intense work he was doing on the 30 books

He thought if he took a break, a walk on the beach of the

Mediterranean Sea near where he lived that he might be restored.

And he came upon a little girl digging a hole in the sand.

With a seashell

She would run to the surf, fill her seashell and rush back and pour the water into the hole she had dug.

Augustine watched her as he walked up to her and asked

Sweetheart, what are you doing?

She replied that she wanted to put the ocean in the hole she had dug.

Augustine gently told her that the ocean was vast and could not possibly fit into the tiny hole she had dug.

She paused for a moment, and with hands on her hips responded:

Then what makes you think you can put the entire majesty of the Trinity into your tiny head.

And she vanished.

Augustine realized that was the problem

He was trying to fit the great immortal mysteries of God  
Into his mortal mind.

Augustine later quipped:

that if we deny the Trinity we can lose our soul  
but if we try to understand it we can lose our minds.

Before going too much further,

Let's be sure we have the doctrine firmly in mind:

Let's go back to the Council of Nicea, a place in present day  
Turkey:

The date is 325 A.D.

And a pitched battle is about to be waged  
Over what would become the central doctrines  
of the Christian Church.

Among the controversies was the Trinity.

They had debated it for years

But now it was coming to a climax.

Athanasius, a deacon from Alexandria, Egypt

Was opposed by Arius, a bishop from Antioch.

They had had a good faith disagreement over the Trinity for years.

But Athanasius had cleverly disseminated a paper on the subject  
before the Council convened to persuade the 318 bishops.

His work was forever after known as the Athanasian Creed.

And is one of the three creeds to which the Anglican faith  
adheres today.

In short declarative sentences

Here is how Athanasius described the Trinity:

“We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity  
Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance

For there is one Person of the Father  
Another of the Son  
And another of the Holy Ghost

But the Godhead of the Father  
Of the Son  
And of the Holy Ghost  
Is all one,  
The glory equal  
The majesty co-eternal

Such as the Father is  
Such is the Son  
And such is the Holy Ghost

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate and the Holy Ghost uncreate

The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, the Holy  
Ghost incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

And yet, they are not three eternals, but one eternal.

As also there are not three incomprehensibles,  
Nor three uncreate  
But one uncreate  
And one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is almighty  
The Son almighty  
And the Holy Ghost almighty.

And yet they are not three almighties but one almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God.

And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord and the Holy Ghost Lord.

And yet not three Lords but one Lord

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to  
 acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord;  
 So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion  
 to say there are three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone

Not made  
 Nor created  
 But begotten

The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son

Neither made,  
 Nor created,  
 Nor begotten  
 But proceeding

So there is one Father, not three Fathers

There is one Son  
 Not three Sons  
 One Holy Ghost, Not three Holy Ghosts

And in this Trinity none is afore or after another.

None is greater  
 Or less than another;

But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.

So that in all things as is aforesaid,  
 The Unity in Trinity  
 And the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped.

He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.”

The debate at the Council of Nicea went on for four months  
 But in the end all 318 Bishops concurred  
 in what we now know as the Nicene Creed,  
 where you can see much  
 of the Creed of Athanasius embedded.

So here we are 17 centuries later.  
 What are we to know about the Trinity for our soul’s health?

The God we know consists of three Persons  
 The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost

Yet, there is One God.  
 Our God, the Three Persons  
 Were not created, but existed before time itself.  
 They stand outside of time, where for them, the past, the present  
 and the future are all one.

Our God, the Three Persons  
 Are eternal. They have always been in existence and will  
 always exist.

The Father was made of none  
 That is; He was neither created nor begotten.  
 The Son is of the same substance as the Father  
 But was not made or created  
 He was begotten.

The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son

He is of the same substance as the Father and the Son.  
 He was not created, not made and not begotten;  
 But He proceeded from the Father and the Son.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are co-equal

No one of them is greater or lesser than the others.  
 And no one of the Persons is more powerful than the others.

As far as I can tell, they never act alone.

I can't think of an instance in scripture  
 or in my life  
 when only the Father, or only the Son or  
 only the Holy Ghost was at work.

That is the core belief which as St Augustine said

We must believe to save our souls.

For those who must pursue the "how" and the "why":

Now for the part in which we can loose our minds;

Some wonder, how could the Father exist when there was nothing?

If He was not created and He wasn't begotten  
 How did He come into existence?

What happened to make the Son begotten?

How did the Holy Ghost proceed from the Father and the Son?

And how is it that none came before or after the other in time?

How can I understand eternity and existence without time as  
 we know it; running in a linear fashion one minute after the other  
 into the future or one minute before the last into the past?

How is it that the Three are one?

Shouldn't one plus one plus one equal three?

How are the Three Persons eternal?

What is the state of existence in which past, present and future are all one? What does that look like? And how does it feel?

These and I am sure many other “imponderables” can consume us. And maybe God’s plan is that we spend our entire lives contemplating them.

For in the contemplation,

Sometimes we encounter many other aspects and facets of Christianity.

God has chosen to reveal the doctrine of the Trinity to us

In the inspired word of His Holy Scripture.

But He has not chosen to reveal the “how and the why”.

Can we let what He has not revealed to us

Somehow denigrate what He has revealed?

Perhaps in this life it is enough that we know by faith the doctrine of the Trinity itself. And that we must be content to understand more fully the answers to the “how and why” questions in the next life.

Perhaps the answers to the “how and the why” are in the little girl on St Augustine’s beach trying to put the entire ocean in a little hole in the sand.

What makes us think that we can fill our tiny brains with the entire majesty and infinity of God?

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

