

Trinity Sunday Sermon

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

When God revealed the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the very first commandments he gave concerned worship. *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make any graven image. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."* These three commandments form a unified defense against the oldest sin of mankind: idolatry, the worship of something else besides God. The first commandment forbids worshipping false gods. The second prohibits reducing the true God to a created thing or an image of our own devising. The third warns against speaking of God falsely, taking his name in vain. Together, they teach us that God alone must be worshipped and worshipped as he is, not as we might prefer him to be.

Trinity Sunday helps the Church fulfill these commandments in the New Covenant. Today, having spent the last few months studying the story of Christ's ministry from Advent to Pentecost, we turn from the narrative of salvation to contemplate directly the God who saves. We remember that he has revealed himself to be neither the simple deity of the philosophers nor the many gods of the pagans, but one God in three Persons, a mystery beyond our invention. As the Athanasian Creed declares: *"We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal."* This language is precise, despite its paradoxes, to avoid the errors of heresy and, ultimately, idolatry.

Our Collect for today reminds us that knowledge of the Trinity is a gift from God: he has *"given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity."* The Trinity is not a creative theological theory to be studied, but a reality to be entered into and worshipped by faith.

The Church affirms the unity of God declared in the Shema of Deuteronomy 6: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." However, the revelation of God in Christ requires a deepened understanding of God's unity beyond what Israel imagined. While the trinitarian nature of God is faintly visible in the Old Testament, the Gospel makes it clear. For example, at our Lord's baptism, the Spirit descended upon him like a dove and the Father's voice spoke from heaven: *"This is my beloved Son."* In a single moment, the three Persons were made manifest. When Jesus commissioned his Apostles, he commanded them to "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." Now at our own baptisms, each of us is united to God in that Name, born of water and the Spirit into a communion older than creation.

Our Revelation lesson today draws us deeper into this communion by lifting the veil on heaven itself. Saint John, in the Spirit, beholds a throne and One seated upon it in terrible splendor. Grasping for words worthy of his vision, John compares the sight of God to precious gems and an emerald rainbow over a sea of glass. Around the throne, he hears heavenly beings cry: *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"* Three times Holy -- once for each Person of the Godhead -- and yet one unbroken hymn to the one God.

Yet this God enthroned in glory does not remain distant from us. In our Gospel, Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, comes to Jesus by night. This detail of the hour of his visit is significant: Saint John means us to feel the weight of his darkness. Nicodemus, "the teacher of Israel," has seen the signs done by Jesus. Yet, he is in spiritual darkness and cannot perceive the Kingdom of God. He stands for all of us, children of Adam, who grope in the night of sin. To Nicodemus, our Lord speaks of the enlightenment we all must receive: *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*

Then Jesus unveils the heart of the Trinity's saving work: *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."* The Father sends. The Son is lifted up. The Spirit gives new birth. The whole Trinity acts in concert for our salvation. Fittingly, the very next verse of John's Gospel is the famous John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." As Saint Augustine of Hippo observed, in every act of love, there is a lover, a beloved, and the love that binds them -- and in this he glimpsed a picture of the Trinity. The Father loves from all eternity, the Son is beloved, and the Spirit is the bond of their love. The glory of the Gospel is that in Christ, we now share in this love.

On this Trinity Sunday, we do not merely remember an esoteric and complicated doctrine. Rather, we are drawn upward into the life and worship of God himself. The same Spirit who hovered over the deep at creation will open our eyes in grace to see what Nicodemus could not: that the God who made us, saves us, and sanctifies us is one God, the blessed Trinity, from before all worlds and unto the ages of ages. The heavenly worship John observed is the same worship we join at the altar. In the Eucharist, the veil between this sanctuary and that heavenly throne room will grow thin, and we will stand where John stood, offering praise to the Father, by the Son, in the Spirit. So then, with the angels and archangels, the living creatures who never rest, and all the company of heaven, we cry: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

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