

The Feast of the Holy Trinity – John 3:1-15

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

This is Trinity Sunday, the day we celebrate our One God in Three persons and Three persons in one God. 3 in 1 and 1 in 3 is how we define the Trinity. But the word “Trinity,” interestingly enough, is found nowhere in the Bible. We can read every word of the Scriptures and leave no rock unturned in the Old and New Testaments, and we won’t find the word “Trinity.” However, this name of the Triune God is found in two of the most important passages in the New Testament. Number 1: the commission of the Lord that all nations shall be baptized “in name the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Number 2: The apostolic benediction used so often by St. Paul in his communication to the church and spoken to us by pastors in the divine office: “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” These two passages remind us of the Triune God’s continued dwelling with us. This we celebrate on Trinity Sunday.

Today is also Father’s Day, the day we celebrate the men who brought us into this world, or as today’s Gospel says, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” God ordained our fathers’ protection and provision for us. The Scriptures exhort us to honor these men: “... [W]e have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Discipline from human fathers is limited in time span and can be subjected to their own distinct methods. Nevertheless, we honor them. This we celebrate on Father’s Day.

From our earthly fathers, we inherit our names, our last names, that is. “That which is born of flesh is flesh.” So too, we inherit from the Heavenly Father His name in Holy Baptism, that name which is placed upon each of us: “the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Through Holy Baptism, “that which is born of spirit is spirit.”

Baptism. Jesus catechized Nicodemus in the way to salvation through Holy Baptism in today’s Gospel. This dialogue between the Lord and the Pharisee wandering in the night is mentioned only in John’s Gospel. John may not have realized the significance that night which Nicodemus came to Jesus, but he understood afterward in writing this Gospel. Nicodemus and all who heard the voice of the Lord were part of the fulfillment of God’s promise to His people. Nonetheless, Nicodemus came in during the night. He had the conviction that Jesus was a teacher come from God, yet not the boldness to admit that fact during the daylight hours. The uneasy and timid Nicodemus wanted to know the answer to the question and he and many other Jews had at the time: “What must I do to attain eternal life?” He thought this Galilean Teacher just might have the answer.

For the first century Jews, for many people since that time, the question of salvation centers on what *I do*. Perhaps we take for granted that we have the resources to enter into the kingdom of God. For some of us it's our own comprehensive understanding: Can I believe this? Does the Christian faith hold up when put to the intellectual test? Are there holes in the Christian faith? Can I find an explanation that's more probable or reasonable? For some of us it's a question of morals. What course of action will I take when faced with an ethical dilemma? Will I always choose right over wrong in thought, word, and deed?

In both of these instances, whether Christianity is merely an intellectual exercise or following a moral code, we believe we already have the necessary resources to be a Christian. "I can figure out Christianity" or "I can keep the law." The Lord says this is a big mistake. Salvation doesn't start with what I am to do, rather, what the Son of Man does and what the Father gives. Something new is needed; something coming from outside of man, though, through a Man. Something that only God can give us: we must be reborn from above.

Still Nicodemus asks, "How can a man be born when He is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" What is the answer to these questions? Yes or No? Can a man be born when he is old? Yes, Nicodemus, but only through death, for the old man in us must "be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Yes, Nicodemus. Not only can he, he must! He must enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born. Baptism is your second birth, the font is your second womb, and the Church is your second mother.

In this Baptism and in no other place we find the essential definition of the Triune God on this Trinity Sunday. In the Father's sending of Son through the Holy Spirit we see the essence of paternal love on Father's Day. Those baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit recognize the voice of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Those who receive the Word by the Spirit receive also Jesus, the Word Incarnate and Son of God, and whoever receives the Son receives the Father. Johann Jacob Rambach's hymn offers this prayer to the Triune God about our baptisms: "My Loving Father, here you take me To be henceforth your child and heir. My faithful Savior, here You make me The fruit of all your sorrows share. O Holy Spirit, comfort me When threat'ning clouds around I see." (LSB 590:2) One cannot have only part of the Holy Trinity. God's will comes to pass not only in the Father revealing the Son, but also that the Holy Spirit is in the revelation of the Son, working faith in those who hear. Reject the Word and you reject God. Cleave to the Word and you cleave to God. Believe in the Triune God and you have eternal life. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠