

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Our reflection is based on the passage from Acts with consideration also to the other lessons we heard for this Sunday in which we celebrate the Holy Trinity.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth, your word is truth. Amen

In two remarkable instances recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (namely, Matthew, Mark and Luke) God, the Father, bears doubtless witness to his beloved Son. First, the Spirit of God descends like a dove at Jesus' Baptism and rests on him. Then, a voice coming from heaven says: This is my Son with whom I am well pleased. Second, at his transfiguration, a cloud overshadows Jesus and his disciples and a voice coming from the cloud says: This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him! However, these aren't the only instances where the Heavenly Father bears witness to Jesus. At his ascension, for instance, Jesus was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight and Peter then tells us that he went back to the place where he came from – the right hand of God – and that he will come again. But before he left he said that he would be with us always until the end of time.

During his earthly ministry Jesus said that: when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And so it was! At Pentecost the Spirit of God came upon the 12 apostles and the first thing they did was to bear witness to the great and magnificent day of the Lord in which Jesus Christ was delivered to be crucified by lawless hands, with the foreknowledge of God, to become our savior and redeemer.

No matter where you look in the Bible it all points to Christ. It's like a crosshair that is always aimed at Jesus, or even like a spotlight that is always on him. The revealed word of God in the Bible points to Christ on the cross. The cross is the best way to visualize all that the Bible is about. It even resembles a crosshair or a mark on a map indicating where the treasure chest is to be found. The treasure I am talking about is the saving action of the God and where it took place.

But, so that we can properly understand God's plan of salvation, the Bible teaches us that God is one in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We also learn from it that the three persons in the Trinity are not just three different ways God manifests himself, but that each person (not manifestations) has distinct characteristics of individuality. Yet, the Trinity remains one absolute unity because each person has all the divine attributes of the ONE and ONLY God.

To talk about the Trinity is always mind twisting because there's nothing in creation that we can compare with God to help us understand the greatness of an omniscient, omnipresent and eternal God who revealed himself in three persons. St Augustine summarized quite well, and in a positive way, our philosophical struggle with the understanding of the Trinity: God is greater and truer in our thoughts than in our words, he wrote, yet God is greater and truer in reality than in our thoughts.

Now, you may ask: What does it profit to know that God is Three in One? And I won't keep you in suspense until the end of this sermon. We benefit by learning, on the one hand, what we are and, on the other hand, that our salvation depends exclusively on the grace and works of God.

But, let me explain.

Like coordinates in a map, the Trinity triangulates for us the scope of our sinful nature and indicates the consequence of our sin, which is death. In this highlighted spot, Father and Holy Spirit, point to the redeeming works of the Son Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In Christ's sufferings we are shown the extent of our guilt and misery as he utters our own words on the cross: Father, why have you forsaken me? From the cross we also hear Jesus interceding for us: Father, forgive them. On the cross God fulfilled all that is written about himself being our saviour as he solemnly declared before breathing his last: It is finished!

Christ, the author of life, gave up his Spirit. No one took it from him. He gave it up in our stead, out of sheer pity for us. The history of all human beings of all times and places converges to this one cross of Jesus where we behold the saving love of the Father in the Son who gave up his life to give us a new life free from sin.

However, the most extraordinary act in this divinely orchestrated unfolding of events was yet to happen. God had determined it even before time itself began that Christ would not be left in hell and that his body would not experience decay. Thus the Father raised Christ from the dead in order to uphold us, his new creation, with his Holy Spirit.

This is what the 12 apostles stood up for, boldly and in the midst of those who had condemned Jesus to death. Although they may have feared for their lives, they knew that what they were saying didn't come out of their own reasoning and realization. They had learned about all the promises the Father had made in the Old Testament and who they pointed to – from Christ himself. They had witnessed him accomplishing all those prophecies and then they were given the Spirit of Truth to bear witness to all they saw.

They weren't to speak by themselves about the things God had accomplished in Christ. God himself spoke through them, and out of the abundance of the Holy Spirit in their hearts they were able to proclaim with their mouths.

Likewise, when we join in our confession of faith after having received God's Word, it is also because his Word is very near us in our mouths and in our hearts. This doesn't happen because we reason and realize this mystery by ourselves, but because the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts.

Only the Holy Spirit enables us to see, hear and speak of Christ. It is the Lord's voice that ploughs our dry flesh and turns it into fertile land for that seed Jesus scatters to grow. In other words, we may see and hear the stories about how Christ saved us but only the Holy Spirit gives us the O-now-I-get-it and the faith to believe that message. Without Christ we are dust. With Christ we share in the life of the author of life himself.

Christ became human in all possible aspects and because he is also God in every possible aspect he took our place as the perfect substitute once and for all. The God who Isaiah saw in today's lesson from the Old Testament, whose voice shook the threshold of the temple, and whom the archangels praised with a triple Holy in allusion to his Triune essence took a sinful flesh into his holiness so that we could become as holy as he is.

The preached word we now receive is the crucified Christ, who by the power of the Holy Spirit took on a human body and a human mind with which he felt cold, pain, anguish and fear just like we do. The Word of God together with the life giving waters of Baptism is Christ – and him crucified. The bread and the wine in the Lord’s Supper are the same scourged body and the same shed blood of Christ that strengthen and preserve us unto life everlasting.

Only the Holy Spirit enables us to worship our Heavenly Father in the splendor of holiness (as in the Psalm of David) and to give thanks for our Lord Jesus Christ, ascribing to him all glory and strength.

Only the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son makes it possible for the true Word of God to be preached faithfully because he points to the truth of Christ alone who lived like us and among us teaching about God’s grace. Unlike us, however, he died as sinless as he was conceived to be our scapegoat. In Christ alone has God made known to us the way of life and the Holy Spirit gives us that living faith which we confess in the hymns we sing and in the creeds we say.

Thus, our creeds, like the one we are about to say, are not a manifesto of war of God’s Church against the world or a declaration of our exclusion from it as if we didn’t want anything to do with those who are still out there. On the contrary, it is a testimony to the fact that we have been saved from it because God once took into his divine nature our own nature in order to rescue us all from sin and eternal death. Our confession of faith to one another (and to whosoever wishes to come here and listen) is loaded with thanksgiving to God for all his mighty works but most of all, it is a proclamation of the saving love of God in his Son Jesus Christ and in whom we trust for our salvation with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen