

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Today is Trinity Sunday when we affirm the ancient teaching and yet also modern and relevant doctrine of the “one-God-in-three-persons,” but some of you might be thinking that we should first talk about the existence of God before we attempt to define the essence of God – and you might be right.

Contrary to what some might claim, our Bible does not present proof of God’s existence, though it does go to great lengths to describe the mighty acts of God, trusting in and affirming the reality of a loving and supreme being.

But God is simply a “given” in Scripture, and the Bible is a “believer’s book,” beginning and ending with accounts of how God is at work on humanity’s behalf, carrying out a divine plan of salvation, and this in spite of human sin, evil, and even the physical limitation of death.

It wasn’t Yuri Gagarin, but one of the other early Russian cosmonauts who, nearly a half-century ago, announced to a group of reporters at a press conference in Seattle, “In my travels around the earth, I saw no God or angels.” But in truth, the denial of God is as old as is belief in the existence of God.

In parts of our Bible, wonder and awe are expressed at the beauty and abundance of nature and creation. Is this world, with its stately trees and attractive flowers, its teeming and diverse plant and animal life, its magnificent, soaring mountains and glistening rivers and seas, its sun and moon and stars, and their precise movements – is this world purely an accident?

And what about you and me, and all the other people who have lived and are living on this earth today? Did we just happen? Did we just come into being by chance? Are we nothing more than a freak accident which slowly crawled out from the primordial soup of an evolving planet?

About one hundred fifty years ago, Heinrich Heine, the German poet, made this (I think) tongue-in-cheek comment: He said, “In Frankfurt, I met a watch that did not believe in watchmakers” (which, by the way, doesn’t make it any less a watch [!], I might add).

American pollster George Gallup once said, “I could prove God statistically. Take the human body alone – the chance that all the functions of the individual would just happen is a statistical monstrosity.”

As Christians, we not only say that there is a God, but that this loving God of ours is one in essence and three in person. This is why we call God the “triune God,” which means “three in one.” There are three distinct persons in the one Godhead.

Concerning the oneness and unity of God, the Scriptures say, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). And concerning the three persons which comprise the Godhead, Jesus himself names them all in the passage we call “The Great Commission,” where he says:

“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 ...” (Matthew 28:19).

I have read that among the earliest Christian believers, when someone expressed skepticism regarding the three persons of the triune God, the advice given was, “Go to Jordan; go to the River Jordan.” There at the Jordan, at the baptism of Jesus, the three persons of the triune God were manifested very clearly:

Jesus the Son was in the water being baptized. God the Father proclaimed from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son in the form of a dove.

Leave out any of these three persons, and your God is incomplete. So to speak of the fullness and wholeness of God, you must speak of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Each of these three persons of the Trinity is different and distinct – and yet they are very similar. The Father is our original Creator, and our daily provider.

The Son is our Savior and redeemer, the one who made atonement for our sins on the cross so that we might escape judgment and wrath, and inherit heaven instead. The son also rules the world and guides the Church.

The Holy Spirit is our sanctifier, our comforter, and our advocate. It is the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith in Christ, and keeps us in faith in Christ.

Now, then, the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God; yet there are not three Gods, but only one God. This is something we can’t fully understand and therefore can’t fully explain. It is a mystery we claim beyond full comprehension.

We believe it as from divine revelation rather than our human understanding, for how can we, the creatures, ever expect to fully comprehend the Creator? How can a watch understand the watchmaker?

Some people believe that the Father was first in existence; the Son second – on Christmas day; and the Holy Spirit third – on Pentecost. But this is not the teaching of Scripture, nor the teaching of the ancient creeds, which assert that the three persons of the trinity are co-eternal.

Remember how Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58)? And remember the first creation account, in Genesis, where in the second verse of Scripture it says,

“And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2)?

Along with God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have always been in existence. The three persons of the triune God are co-eternal: they knew no beginning, and they will know no end.

Some people believe that the Father is the most powerful of the three persons of the Trinity; that the Son is second in power; that the Holy Spirit is third in power. But, again, such belief squares neither with Scripture, nor the ancient creeds. The three persons of the Trinity are at the same time co-eternal, and co-equal.

Earlier, I mentioned “The Great Commission.” Jesus begins it by saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18b). “All authority” – Jesus is co-equal to God in power.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus is referred to as “the Word,” “the Word became flesh” (John 1:1-14). In that chapter, it says, “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1:3). Jesus is co-equal to God in the power of creation.

And the Holy Spirit is likewise called the Creator. In Psalm 33, we read, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath [or Spirit] of his mouth” (Psalm 33:6).

An implication you may draw from these scriptures, and this sermon, and certainly from today’s Second Reading and Gospel, is that the three persons of the Trinity work together as one.

As distinct and different as the three persons of the Trinity may be, all three work together in bringing us to faith in Christ, in keeping us in faith in Christ, and, ultimately, in granting us eternal life in Jesus Christ, in the holy presence of almighty God, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Today we salute and worship the one true God, the triune God, the one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

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