

Homily for Trinity Sunday -2023

It's either a game man or a fool who tries to give a 10 minute exposition of the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity but here goes:-

1. Belief that God is one yet three is powerfully implicit in the scriptures, even though the doctrine itself is not actually spelled out. There are, for example, over 50 New Testament "Trinitarian" references where God is spoken of as Father Son and Holy Spirit.
2. There are 3 very simple but incorrect answers to the question how can God be three yet remain one?
 - A) God is one and just appears in three ways. - Called Modalism this safeguards God's unity but denies the reality of Jesus Christ as Son.
 - B) God is three – Tritheism –Mono theism is lost and if three, why not 33 Gods?
 - C) The Father is true God and the Son and spirit are lesser Gods. – Called subordinationism. This makes Jesus and the Spirit lesser Gods or not quite God and again one ends up with a number of Gods or a number of differently ranked Gods.
3. In the early 4th century, one form of the third of these three simple answers was put forward by a prominent priest called Arius who insisted that Jesus as the Son of God was not of the same divine being as the Father and thus not really God in the absolute sense. Arius was a persuasive speaker and a formidable bible scholar. Nearly the whole church followed his teaching.
4. The problem was that once Jesus ceases to be God, how is he then our Saviour? What is the meaning of his crucifixion? He is reduced to being a great teacher who was executed and who possibly rose from the dead but so what? Christian faith is reduced to a new set of moral teachings posited by an executed criminal who may or may not have been resurrected.
5. In this critical hour God raised up St Athanasius to answer the challenges of the Arian teaching. Athanasius taught that God is a Trinity for all eternity. Without the Son there could be no Father and vice versa. Thus if the Father is eternal, so is the Son.
6. Importantly, Athanasius taught that to understand the Bible one must consider the whole of the scripture and one must interpret it in the light of the "tradition of the Fathers." Meaning the teaching of the apostles and their successors up to the time of the Arian controversy.
7. As a result the whole church met at the Council of Nicaea and there the Nicene Creed – the official statement of orthodox teaching - was agreed to by the fathers gathered. Just as, about 275 years earlier, they

gathered at Jerusalem to settle the matter of reception of gentiles into the young church. (see Acts Chapter 15)

8. Most importantly, Athanasius argued that because the Son is spoken of in scripture as God and the church worships him as God, he must be fully God, that is he is of the same being of the Father. (As we have just confessed... Jesus is of "*one substance with the Father*") If the Son is one in being with the Father, he is also one in power, authority and eternity. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is worshipped as God, so the Spirit is God; one in power, authority and eternity with the Father and the Son.
9. A generation later St Augustine, like St Athanasius, one of the greatest Christian minds of all time had this to say:

"The purpose of all who have written before me about the Trinity which God is, has been to teach that, according to the scriptures, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity; and therefore are not three Gods but one God: although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and therefore he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, himself co-equal to the Father and the son, and belonging to the threefold unity.

It was not the three who were born of the blessed Virgin, suffered, died, rose, and ascended but the Son alone. It was not the three who came upon Jesus at his baptism but the Holy Spirit alone. Nor was it the three who spoke saying "You are my Son the beloved"... but it was the Father's voice addressing the Son. This is my faith inasmuch as it is the Catholic Faith".

(St Augustine: De Trinitate)

To which we could all say emphatically on this beautiful Feast Day and indeed every day: *This indeed is my faith inasmuch as it is "the Catholic Faith".*

Cardinal Newman summed up this ever so simply and beautifully in his mighty work 'The Dream of Gerontius' wherein we find this now well known hymn..

"Firmly I believe and truly
God is three and God is one
and I next acknowledge duly
manhood taken by the Son."

Today's feast is primarily about celebrating God as he is, the source and goal of all that is, and the profound beauty and goodness of the communion that is the heart of the Blessed Trinity. Given the great profundity of this

mystery, the nature of God, the best ways of approaching it are by living out this faith in the liturgy of the Church and in our personal prayer.

By prayer and devotion we can lift up our minds and hearts to begin to savour, even in this world, the beauty and grace that is the transcendence of God, and the eternal communion of love and life that is the Trinity. It is by contemplating the Trinity in prayer, silence and study that we are drawn ever deeper into the Triune life, by the entirely free gift of God.