



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Octave Day of Pentecost: "Trinity Sunday" - May 30, 2021

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

Revelation 4:8b (NIV)

While walking along the sidewalk in front of his church, an Anglican priest heard the intoning of a prayer that nearly made his collar wilt. Apparently, the priest's five-year-old son and his young playmates had found a dead sparrow. Feeling that a proper burial should be performed, the boys had secured a small box and some cotton batting. Then they dug a hole and made ready for the disposal of "the deceased." The priest's son (no doubt because of his "familial connections") was chosen to say the appropriate prayers. So, with as much dignity as his five-year-old voice could muster, the boy intoned his version of what he thought his father-the-priest always said:

"Glory be unto the Fa-a-a-ther, and unto the So-n-n-n, and into the hole he goes."



Today, according to the calendar of the Christian Year, is "The Octave Day of Pentecost" or "Trinity Sunday." Did you know that the word "Trinity" is nowhere found in Holy Scripture? **Nowhere!** (Which is not **that** unusual because there are several theological concepts not

found explicitly within the pages of the Holy Bible that Church scholarship, Church history, and Church tradition have validated over the past 2,000 years.) Perhaps one of the most succinct definitions of the Trinity that I've ever read is found on page 143 of Bruce Shelley's 1985 book, "Christian Theology in Plain Language:"

"Within his own mysterious being God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The designations are just ways in which God is God. Within the Godhead there are three 'persons' who are neither three Gods, nor three parts of God, but coequally and coeternally God."

In other words, all three persons of the Godhead – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are **equivalent** and **unified** and have been around (and will be around) **forever**. Moreover, all three **co-exist**, in that all three can be readily apparent **at the same place at the same time**. For instance, we read during the Epiphany Octave that at Jesus' Baptism (as told by St. Mark in 1:1-11 of his Gospel), God the Father spoke, God the Son was baptized in the Jordan River, and God the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, as verse 11 states:

"... like a dove..."

Anyhow, what I **can** tell you – **with all certainty** – is that the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity is one of the central doctrines of Christianity.

"Now the Catholic Faith is this,"

declares verse 3 of the Creed of Saint Athanasius,

"that we worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity."

In the early history of the Church, it was with great difficulty that the doctrine of the Trinity was clarified. For example, St. Athanasius (c. A.D. 296-373), a bishop himself, **was exiled five times** from his own diocese of Alexandria in Egypt, due to his constant struggles against the Arians, who denied that Jesus Christ – the Son of God, the

Second Person of the Godhead – was fully God (which is precisely why we confess in the second paragraph of the “Nicene Creed”):

“God, of God; Light, of Light; Very God, of very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance with the Father;”).

Not surprisingly, due to its length, the Creed of St. Athanasius is normally used by Traditional Anglicans **only once a year** – on this specific day, Trinity Sunday. Surprisingly, however, the Athanasian Creed was probably NOT written by St. Athanasius, but it does contain the truths he both taught and championed throughout his 77-odd years, principally at the Council of Nicaea (c. A.D. 325). (Now, we mere human beings cannot ever hope to even begin to understand our Triune God, let alone explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity; hence, suffice to say that the Holy Trinity is one of those “holy mysteries” that, for the most part, we are asked to accept by faith.)

At any rate, today, Trinity Sunday, also marks the beginning of the longest season by far in the Church Year. Including “Stir-up Sunday” (otherwise known as “The Sunday Next Before Advent”), Trinity Season can last virtually “a month of Sundays” – anywhere from 24 to 28 Sundays, in fact – depending on the date of Easter. (Easter being a movable feast, depends on the time of the full moon following the Spring Equinox. An early Easter, for example, makes for a longer Trinity season; conversely, a later Easter makes for a shorter Trinity season.) This year, Trinity Season lasts 26 Sundays – precisely half a calendar year in duration. In addition, the theme for Trinity Season is living and growing in the Spirit, as we endeavour to apply the “Great Events of Salvation” (Jesus’ incarnation and birth; death; resurrection; ascension; and the sending to us of His Holy Spirit) to our daily living. To this end, the liturgical colour for Trinity Season is green (as green, liturgically speaking, denotes life and growth). Accordingly, Trinity Season is all about living and growing in the Spirit.

Bearing all this in mind, how appropriate it is that in today’s Gospel

Lesson (St. John 3:1-15) our Lord Jesus tells us, in effect, that before we can be about the business of living and growing in the Spirit, we must be “BORN” into that same Spirit – the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. Simply put, therefore, before true life and real growth can begin, spiritual rebirth must take place; for without such spiritual rebirth, there can be no true life, and no real growth, and no positive future – for eternity. Thus, Jesus declares to Nicodemus in verse 3b (and, by extension, to us) that **no one can SEE** the Kingdom of God unless he (or she) is born again. Moreover, Jesus adds – for “Divine emphasis” – in verse 5b that **no one can ENTER** the Kingdom of God unless he (or she) is born:

“...of water and the Spirit.”

- ☞ **No one.**
- ☞ **Not Nicodemus.**
- ☞ **Not you.**
- ☞ **Not me.**
- ☞ **No one.**

Unless we are born again.

Having had the humbling experience of witnessing it firsthand, I can attest that physical birth is **extremely painful** (exactly HOW painful, though, I am woefully unqualified to say – let’s just say I could tell it hurt, A LOT). Also, given my “male inadequacy,” I could not imagine the pain and the sacrifice that was being so selflessly made in order for the life and the growth of another human being to begin in earnest. (To be sure, we all owe a HUGE debt of gratitude to mothers.)

Spiritual rebirth is not without pain and sacrifice either. The pain comes in torrents, with the realization of what we have become as a direct result of living a life without Jesus Christ and His love in our hearts. All at once we are confronted with – and deeply feel – our brokenness and our hopelessness, in addition to the all hurts we

sustained and the all hurts we all-too-often inflicted. The sacrifice comes in choosing to turn our backs on “the world, the flesh, and the devil” and giving total control of our lives to our Lord Jesus.

So, I’m pretty sure that Nicodemus knew all about pain and sacrifice. Oh sure, as a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin – or governing Temple Council – Nicodemus was (according to verse 1b):

“... a RULER of the Jews.”

Which meant that Nicodemus had wealth. And Nicodemus had power. And Nicodemus had prestige. And Nicodemus had fame. But when Nicodemus saw where his life was headed, it caused him no small amount of discomfort – so much discomfort, in fact, that Nicodemus risked absolutely everything to come to Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps that is why in his fear and in his brokenness, Nicodemus first came to Jesus under the cover of darkness; after all, Nicodemus stood to lose a great deal of what the world had to offer (the wealth, and the power, and the prestige, and the fame). However, Nicodemus had heard Jesus teach before, and the Nazarene’s teaching had somehow touched him, shedding some light on the darkness enveloping his heart and life, and, thereby, opening Nicodemus’ eyes to the reality of the world. It also convinced him that Jesus of Nazareth had come from God. And so, Nicodemus earnestly came out of the darkness to seek the “Light of the World” the “Light, of Light” – Jesus Christ. I have no doubt that Nicodemus found exactly what he was looking for because:

1. the next time we read about Nicodemus (St. John 7:45-52), he boldly challenges his brethren in the Pharisee-dominated Sanhedrin because (as ruthless enemies of Jesus) they were striving to condemn the Nazarene unjustly and unlawfully:

“Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, ‘Why didn’t you bring him in?’

'No one ever spoke the way this man does,' the guards replied. 'You mean he has deceived you also?' the Pharisees retorted. 'Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law – there is a curse on them.'

Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 'Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?'

They replied, 'Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.'"

2. the final time we hear about Nicodemus, is following the death of Jesus (St. John 19:38-42):

"Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who had earlier visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there."

Once again, Nicodemus the Pharisee sacrificed everything, by coming to Jesus a second time (this time, though, by broad daylight) and by using an amount of perfumes and spices normally reserved for royal burials in order to honour his Lord. No doubt for Nicodemus no sacrifice would have been too great or too painful.

Unfortunately, though, for the vast majority of humanity, the cost of spiritual rebirth (that is, the pain and the sacrifice) is just too great. So,

given the choice they would rather have:

- ☞ **Their wealth and their toys;**
- ☞ **Their power and their control;**
- ☞ **Their fame and their prestige;**
- ☞ **Their friends and their popularity; and**
- ☞ **Their parties and their indulgences.**

Now, don't get me wrong: none of these things (taken in isolation and in moderation) is inherently bad – for everything that is given to us by God is good. Rather, it's what we do with it, how we choose to use it, or, more to the point, **how we abuse it** that's the problem. In a word, it's "idolatry" and it leads far too many people merrily down the road to oblivion. As Jesus Himself warns us (St. Matthew 7:13):

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."

I must admit, more than merely mystifying me, it literally **blows my circuits** that given the choice of believing in, and following, the One, Holy, and Loving Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – with the abundant life on earth (not to mention the eternal life in heaven) that that entails – shockingly (and sadly), most human beings, it seems, would rather embrace the "Unholy Trinity" of "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and have "heapin' helpin's" of:

- ☞ **Their wealth and their toys;**
- ☞ **Their power and their control;**
- ☞ **Their fame and their prestige;**
- ☞ **Their friends and their popularity; and**
- ☞ **Their parties and their indulgences.**

Consequently, I have made the deliberate choice – and encourage you to do the same – to publicly proclaim, and personally affirm, DAILY the following words of Christian belief. Found on page 545 of the Book of Common Prayer as part of "The Catechism," one might say

they constitute a creed in themselves:

“(First) I learn to have faith in the one true God: in God the Father, who made me and all the world; (second) in God the Son, who redeemed me and all mankind; and (third) in God the Holy Spirit, who Sanctifies me and all the people of God.”

Accordingly, on this “Octave Day of Pentecost” this “Trinity Sunday” as we anticipate another Trinity Season of living and growing in the Spirit, let us, **as re-born Christians**, join with one voice in praise and Holy Worship of our **co-equal, co-existing, co-unified, and co-eternal** Triune God:

☪ **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

☪ **Three Persons in one God.**

☪ **The Holy Trinity.**



Dearest Reader in Christ:

These blogs are offered for your prayerful consideration and spiritual encouragement.

If you wish to use them for some other purpose or to republish them in any form, please credit **The Mission of Saint Mary Magdalene and Fr. Alan Edwardson.**