

[Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31](#)

[Psalm 8](#)

[Romans 5:1-5](#)

[John 16:12-15](#)

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND ALISTAIR SO, S.O.SC., RECTOR OF ALL HALLOWS PARISH, SOUTH RIVER, IN DAVIDSOVILLE, MARYLAND, ON TRINITY SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2013, AT ALL HALLOWS CHAPEL AND THE BRICK CHURCH

In the Name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Some years ago, before I even seriously thought about becoming a priest, when I was a parishioner at Ascension and St. Agnes in Washington, D.C., I witnessed their solemn procession for Trinity Sunday. I knew it was not an ordinary Sunday, because even though Ascension and St. Agnes was known for its high church liturgy, I had not seen this procession and chanting before. The cortege of choir, altar servers and clergy walked in a stately pace, first down the center aisle, then both the side aisles, and then back into the chancel through the center aisle again, all the while chanting the Athanasian Creed, "Quicumque Vult," which begins:

- 1. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;*
- 2. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.*
- 3. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;*
- 4. Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.*

This is followed by a somewhat expanded version of the Nicene Creed.

And then at the conclusion of this creed, we have this:

- 41. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies;*
- 42. and shall give account of their own works.*
- 43. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.*
- 44. This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.*

That's just to give you a flavor. This creed is much longer than the Nicene Creed or Apostles' Creed, with which we are more familiar. Because of its many so-called "damnatory clauses", there have been debates both in the Church of England and the Episcopal Church about having it removed or truncated from services. And it seems that those efforts have been successful. For one thing, when was the last time you recited or even heard about this creed?

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While the Athanasian Creed may not be the most pastorally sensitive statement of faith,

it does push us to ponder over one thing: Can the way we believe in God either lead us to salvation or damnation?

If you embrace the theological framework that God is all merciful and that all humanity will be universally saved no matter what, then this creed harms that sensibility.

But if we are not willing to say that all beliefs are equal,

if we are not willing to say that all spiritual paths lead to the same God,

then perhaps we have already assented to the doctrines about the Trinity contained in the Athanasian Creed, even though we may not want to tell all those who don't believe in the Trinity that they are doomed, because ultimately, that is God's prerogative, not ours.

Truth be told, the Holy Trinity is not an easy concept. As a continuation of the faith of ancient Israel, Christianity inherited monotheism, the one God concept. But clearly, core elements of our Christian history have made a simplistic view of one God more challenging. First, of course, we have Jesus Christ, the "Son of God" who became one of us to show us God's love. Is the Son, Jesus Christ, also God? (Of course, he is!) Second, before Jesus ascended into heaven, he promised the disciples and the believers the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which the Father would send in his name. Is the Holy Spirit God as well? (Of course, she is!)

Early Christians and theologians had to wrestle with these new revelations in the context of the one and only God. The concept of the Trinity in Unity then developed to describe this mystery while maintaining the existence of one God. Now, the word "Trinity" cannot be found directly in the Bible. But the trinitarian formula can be found in a couple of places:

Matthew 28:19 - Great Commission

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

2 Corinthians 13: 13 - Apostolic Benediction

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

From these two places, we can be quite certain that the concept of the Trinity was in existence in the very early days of the Church.

So, we see that Trinity is elemental in and essential to our liturgy and faith. References to the Trinity can, as we've seen, be found in the Bible. But how can we visualize the Trinity in our minds? Can how we teach and share this important, fundamental concept with others?

One of the favorite ways to explain the mystery of the Trinity both to children and adults alike is called "perichoresis." And no, you don't have to use that word. Basically, "peri" means "all around" as in "perimeter"; "choresis" is connected to our word "choreography." Dancing in circle, there you have it! This explanation came from the writings of the early Church Fathers. But the energy and motion of this image are truly timeless. The Trinity is three Persons dancing in a circle hand in hand. This image helps us envision the dynamic relationship, interconnectedness, diversity and unity of the Three in One.

And now, let's have a come to Jesus moment. All of this sounds interesting. All of this could make interesting topics for an adult forum. But you might ask, "Father So, why are you preaching about this? What use does it have for us in daily life?. That's the big "so-what" question.

First and foremost, when faith is an important part of our life, we need to be able to articulate it for ourselves, for our children and for others who come into contact with us in our lives. Sometimes, they just want to know. And you never want answer, "I don't know why. I just believe."

In 1 Peter 3:15, we have this exhortation from the apostle:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

My brothers and sisters, are you ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for that hope that you have?

I believe that knowing who God is, who Jesus is, and who the Holy Spirit is, is a big part of that hope.

Second, sometimes, we need to render a defense for our faith. Sometimes, we need to help clear up some misunderstandings.

I recall that a Muslim friend once shared with me the book they give to converts. The big, glaring thing I saw is this:

“God is one and unique. God does not have a son.”

Clearly, that demonstrates a lack of understanding of the Christian concept of the Son of God, let alone Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity.

How would you answer?

Third, it makes sense for us to be interested in the Trinity - which is so central to the faith which has empowered countless saints through the ages to make our world a better place.

At our parish, there is a strong interest in our history. There is a strong interest in the legacy of those who have gone before us. That interest is a reflection of our interconnectedness. That interest is a reflection of the fact that the world is tied together by knots.

That interest, ultimately, all goes back to the Trinitarian legacy of our faith, to the unbreakable bond of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We are here because of the Trinity.

My fellow journeyers in faith, with the help of the Almighty, may we reflect in our selves and in our parish the Unity of the Holy Trinity, holding hands and dancing together in joy and worship!

Amen.

