

Holy Trinity B (6/07/09 – *Triune Life–Love–Salvation*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

A Pharisee ... a ruler of the Jews – Nicodemus by name – comes to Jesus by darkness of night. He has heard and seen Jesus’ miraculous signs. More importantly, he has heard Jesus’ teaching. It is different ... intriguing ... authoritative ... comforting – unlike any teaching he has ever heard. Nicodemus is, after all, a Pharisee; and – like the Pharisees who opposed Jesus and His teaching in general – caught up in the works-righteous thinking of the flesh. Nicodemus’ name means *conqueror of the people ... conqueror of the human masses* – he is a leader of the people, a ruler of the Jews. And he may think that he is also *conqueror of his own human flesh* – but he isn’t. And he knows it – whenever he lets down the façade of perfect living ... whenever he lets God’s Word of Law convict him of his sins.

Nicodemus knows that Jesus’ work and teaching are different ... something that he desires – but he doesn’t know how to get from “point A” to “point B” ... how to get from his works to God’s grace ... how to get from the Law to Christ’s Gospel ... how to get from his flesh to God’s Spirit (to put it in terms of our *Gospel Text* for this *Feast of the Holy Trinity*).

We understand Nicodemus; for, like it or not, we are **all** like Nicodemus according to our natural, inborn flesh. We are **all** by our corrupted natures “works-righteous” in our thinking and belief – at least until the Holy Spirit quietly yet mightily blows into our dead flesh the breath of life. We would all remain in deep darkness – like the night in which Nicodemus comes to our Lord – if God the Father did not shine the bright light of His forgiveness, life, and salvation into our lives. We would all remain in Nicodemus-like ignorance, if Christ did not teach us. We would all remain mere fleshly children, if the Holy Spirit did not come to us and overshadow us with the Gospel so that we might be born anew from above into the Kingdom.

So it is that on this *Feast of the Holy Trinity* we hear and hopefully learn about *Triune Life–Love–Salvation*.

The first thing we need to do, perhaps, on this *Feast of the Holy Trinity* is simply recognize the Triune reality of the One, True God. Other religions won’t get this truth – Jews and Muslims alike would accuse us of worshipping three gods, contrary to God’s clear self-revelation as being One. Even some of those who call themselves Christians not only refuse to recognize the Scriptural teaching of the Trinity, but also accuse us (and Christendom in general) of introducing a doctrine not taught by God in the Bible. They challenge us to show a single passage in Holy Writ that mentions the Trinity – as if the lack of the specific word proves

their point.

But from the very beginning God has revealed His Triune existence – three Persons in the One undivided Godhead – as we confessed in the *Athanasian Creed*. God the Father creates by means of His Word (the Son) as the Holy Spirit hovers over the primordial waters [GEN 1]. On the sixth day, God does not say, “Let Me create man in My image” but ***Let US make man in OUR image, after OUR likeness*** [GEN 1.26] – and notice, that the image and likeness are in the singular, while God speaks of Himself in the plural. But in the very next verse, Scripture says: ***So God created man in HIS own image, in the image of God he created him*** – back to the singular.

In our *Old Testament Lesson* for this Sunday – Isaiah’s heavenly vision of the Lord – it is no accident that the seraphim continually cry out to one another: ***Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts*** [ISA 6.3] ... the so-called *Trishagion* (thrice-holy) ... nor that the seraphim have **three** pairs of wings. And in verse 8 of our text we have the interesting concurrence of both singular and plural references of God: ***And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for US?”*** The One, True God is Triune – Three Persons in One united, undivided Substance.

In our *Second Reading* from ACTS, Peter (by the ***Pentecost*** working of the Holy Spirit of God) preaches that Jesus has been ***exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing*** [ACTS 2.33]. Peter goes on to say that even David spoke of Christ as Lord (that is, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity) to Whom the Father Lord (the First Person of the Trinity) spoke, saying: ***Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool*** [ACTS 2.34-35; PSA 110.1].

Finally, in our *Holy Gospel* [JN 3.1-17] the Lord Jesus Christ teaches Nicodemus about the work of the Holy Spirit to bear believers into the Kingdom, in which we have salvation and life because of the love of God for us in Christ. Or, to put it another way, we have the revelation of ***Triune Life–Love–Salvation***. For in the Triune God we have true, abundant, and eternal life, since in His eternal love God the Father has sent His Son on our behalf to work our eternal salvation, into which salvation the Holy Spirit causes us to be born by means of the Word and Sacraments.

Now you might wonder why I begin with *life* in the sermon title: ***Triune Life–Love–Salvation***. After all, isn’t our **life** the **result** of God the Father’s **love** in sending the Son to work **salvation**? Shouldn’t the title be something like: ***Triune Love–Salvation–Life***? What we should consider is that the life we have because of

God's loving salvation in Christ first existed in the eternal Godhead. Jesus says: ***For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself.*** [JN 5.26] The Triune God is the God **WHO IS** ... the God Who has life ... eternally. The Trinity is the God **Who is and Who was and Who is to come** [REV 1.4] ... the great **I AM** [EXO 3.14]. It is this life and existence – Himself, really – that God desires to share with us. It is why He created us ... and re-creates us. And in that eternal life, the eternal Godhead loves with an everlasting love. The unbegotten Father loves the Son ... and the begotten Son loves the Father. But God desires to share His love still more – just like He shares His life. Therefore in love the Father sends the Son into the world ... **NOT to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him** [JN 3.17]. So it is that from the eternal, inner life of the Triune God flows all that we need: *Triune Life–Love–Salvation*.

These things are not ours innately. We are born into this life, but we are dying from the moment of our birth – headed toward the tomb as soon as we leave the womb. But more than that; just as we could not choose to be born of and in the flesh, much less can we choose to be born of and in the Spirit. In fact, **unlike** our first birth, we constantly struggle against the new birth of the Spirit – that's the extent of the corruption of our sinful flesh. Our flesh constantly strives against God, refusing to be re-born into a new **life**. Our flesh constantly strives against God, refusing His redeeming **love**. Our flesh constantly strives against God, refusing the **salvation** that He would lavish upon us ... both now and forever.

That's why you and I need God the Father this *Feast of the Holy Trinity* ... and **every** day. He is the Maker of all things in heaven and on earth. And He is your **RE-Creator** as well. He makes you new in Baptism, drowning and killing the old sinful you in its waters, so that you would be raised up from the font to brand new ... spiritual ... eternal ... *Triune Life!* You are born again in the sacrament of Baptism – by the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel-Word attached to the waters – born from above to heavenly, everlasting life in Christ Jesus!

Because of your sinful flesh, you need God the Son this *Holy Trinity Sunday* ... and **every** day. For He is your Redeemer – the only One Who could pull you out of the depths of your un-loveliness back into His *Triune Love*. For you had been bitten by the devil himself and have the venom of his hateful desire to sin coursing in your veins – tempting you to sin ... causing you to receive its wages of everlasting death and eternal separation from the love of God. But Jesus, the Son of Man, in love for His Father and in love for you **descended from heaven** [JN 3.13] and was willing to **be lifted up** [3.14] in your place at the Cross – where He became **your** sin and suffered **your** punishment and **your** death – so that you could be lifted up in Him and again experience His *Triune Love*.

Because of your sinful flesh, you need God the Holy Spirit this *Trinity Day* ... and **every** day. For He is the one Who deals with your faith so that you can rely on the invisible workings of God you cannot see or comprehend otherwise. He brings to your mind and heart those truths of Jesus that would be unfathomable without His help. He comes into your life unseen – hiding Himself in the Gospel-Word ... to reveal to you *Triune Salvation*. He causes you to hear the Gospel and believe – to fear, love, and trust in God above all things – that you might be eternally saved. He works in you repentance and faith, so that you believe and trust Christ's loving sacrifice for your life and salvation ... so that you believe and trust Jesus' Body is in the bread, and His Blood in the cup at Communion for your forgiveness.

From the Triune God's timeless life flow His eternal love and His everlasting salvation – which in turn give you life, cause you truly to love (both God and neighbor), and overflow in you to draw still others into well-spring of salvation in Christ. On this *Feast of the Holy Trinity* God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit comes to you to bring you into all the blessed truth and blessings of His *Triune Life-Love-Salvation*.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]