

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Text: Isaiah 6:1-7; Romans 11:33-36; St. John 3:1-17

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Our worship and practice are informed by our faith and a result of our confession. In the same way, our faith is not immune to our form of worship. Each is inextricably bound to the other. Saint Prosper of Aquitaine, a disciple of Saint Augustine of Hippo and a lay theologian of the fifth century, put it this way: *“As one worships so one believes, and as one believes so one worships.”* Therefore, what one believes and how one worships is also inextricably linked to that which one confesses. Thus, your confession only moments ago: *“This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved.”* (The Athanasian Creed)

I am fully aware that the word, *“catholic”* makes many Lutherans more than a bit uncomfortable. After all, you were not taught to use that word for anything other than for the Holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church, or as we perhaps better know it, the Roman Catholic Church.

However, the word, *“catholic”* predates the Church of Rome with all her heresies and false worship, and in fact, has a far nobler meaning than any one religious body or denomination—Roman or otherwise. In its proper sense, the word, *“catholic”* means universal. Thus, when we recite the ecumenical creeds, the Apostles’, Nicene, or Athanasian creeds, it is proper to use the word *“catholic”* emphasizing our common faith and confession as ***one Body in CHRIST***. It is as Saint Paul declared to the Christians in Ephesus, *“There is one body and one SPIRIT, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one LORD, one faith, one Baptism; one God and FATHER of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

It is for this reason, that today we come together as one Body in CHRIST to bask in the divine light of the majesty and mystery of our Triune God. It is in God, the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY SPIRIT, that we live and move and have our being. Today, we commemorate our common faith, indeed, the common *“catholic”* faith of all Christendom: that the one and only true God is FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT, and that each Person of this Holy Trinity possesses the Godhead completely. This *“community”* of the Godhead is more than can be explained and there is no question that it is more than we might ever understand on this side of heaven. Still, we Christians confess and affirm not three Gods, but one God.

This faith is more easily believed than explained or understood. It has survived throughout all of history. It has not been overcome by empires, persecution by its enemies, past or present, nor the neglect of those who claim it as their confession. The gates of hell cannot defeat it and there is no heresy that has been able to withstand it. Throughout the world there is One Holy Christian, *“catholic,”* and Apostolic Church which preserves, preaches, and teaches the true doctrines of the Christian faith. This Church hears Holy Scripture read and proclaimed,

is joined together in one Baptism, celebrates one Supper of Christ's most holy Body and Blood, and confesses the one true faith in the undivided and Holy Trinity: God who is the FATHER, whose SON, JESUS CHRIST, born of human flesh, is of the same substance as that of the FATHER, and whose SPIRIT proceeds forth from both FATHER and SON.

This God, and no one else, and nothing else, is our only reality. In Him, our mortality is absorbed into His immortality. Without God, our time and lives are nothing more than dust in the wind, mere passing shadows and fleeting moments that can never be recovered. Without God our life, indeed all life, has no meaning. Even the greatest of us, those remembered by history and celebrated by men, even all our glory, is no more than the flowers and grass of the field, which are here today, and tomorrow thrown into the fire.

For the Christian even as for all creation, God is everything! He is the FATHER who provides all that we need for this body and life. He is the SON, through whom all things are made and by whom we are redeemed. He is the HOLY SPIRIT, who proceeds from the FATHER and the SON and is the holy breath of God who preserves all things in heaven and earth and keeps His Church in the one true faith. He is the Breath of God that blows "*...where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes.*" He is the very Breath of God breathed into the nostrils of man so that man became a living soul.

The Holy Trinity is the same God in whose presence the Prophet Isaiah could not abide. This God was too much for him. Isaiah mourned for himself and his people. He was a man of unclean lips, living in the midst of a people with unclean lips. Isaiah knew that he was not worthy to sing the song of the angels or even to see the vision before him. He had no wings with which he could hide himself and cover his shame. In the midst of Isaiah's fear an angel came forth, a seraph from the army of God, one who serves in the Temple of the LORD day and night singing to the glory of God. He flew to the altar and took from it a burning coal, a remnant of the burnt offering, and placed it, burning, upon Isaiah's lips. Isaiah's sin was forgiven, he was made holy like the angel, for he partook of that which was sacrificed in his place. It was put in his mouth and it made him clean.

The God whom Isaiah feared is the same God in whose presence we alone cannot abide. To stand in God's presence alone would be too much for us. For we, like the Prophet, Isaiah, are men and women of unclean lips, living in the midst of a people with unclean lips. Alone, we are not worthy to sing the song of the angels or even to witness this vision. We have no wings with which to hide ourselves and cover our shame. But do not mourn for yourself. Nor should you fear! There is no need. You are not alone.

There is no need to mourn, nor is there any reason to fear because this Trinity is the same God, who did not covet the glories of heaven, but was driven by His compassion and desire to save you, His people. He is the same God whose judgments and ways are past finding out. This Trinity is the same God who came in human flesh and died your death that you may live and have salvation; the same God who rose from the grave three days later, conquering death forever. This is the same God who ascended into heaven and, in the flesh of man, sits at the right hand of the FATHER.

All this, God did while we were still His enemies. This is the God who sent His comforting SPIRIT among us that we may have faith. At the death cry of this God who died on the Cross of Calvary, the HOLY SPIRIT rushed forth in Blood and water from His side so that in Baptism the Name of the Triune God, whose Name shakes the very foundations of heaven and earth and destroys the pillars of hell, could be printed on your forehead. Thus, you are marked by the sign of the Holy Cross in your Baptism, and the Name of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT is imprinted and engraved upon your forehead and your heart to mark you as one redeemed by CHRIST the Crucified.

This Trinity is the same God who places a burning coal from the sacrifice of His Flesh and Blood upon your lips and your sins are forgiven. In this, you have been made holy like the angels, for you have partaken of that which was sacrificed in your place. It is put into your mouth and has made you clean. All the glory that was God's and is God, are compressed into the moment of CHRIST's Cross and crucifixion, and that Cross and crucifixion are compressed into the Holy Sacrament of JESUS' Body and Blood. In the LORD's Supper, you meet the Triune God.

For you, the Triune God, whom you confess, is revealed not in heaven, but in the humiliation of the crucified CHRIST. His Cross is our only door to heaven, and CHRIST is the only icon of God. He who sees JESUS sees the FATHER and has already received the HOLY SPIRIT. He has been born again of water and SPIRIT and will enter the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, on this day, as one body, we put everything aside and contemplate the God who gives us all good things, who created and redeemed us with His Flesh and through the Holy SPIRIT has made us His own. We are here as God's people in God's Church. We are gathered with all the saints and angels, Prophets, Apostles, and martyrs—all who have gone before us in the faith and all who will follow us long after we are gone. With this glorious company, we gather around the altar of God singing the threefold "*Holy, Holy, Holy.*"

With the whole company of the heavenly hosts, we sing the Gloria in Excelsis lauding and magnifying God's glorious Name. Therefore, our liturgy and our worship are not our own; they are heaven's. We hear the angels sing and we who stand at the edge of Heaven respond, "*Blessed be the HOLY TRINITY and the undivided unity; let us give glory to Him for He has shown mercy unto us.*" (Trinity Introit) We are here to worship the Triune God and hear Him say, "*I forgive you all your sins.*"

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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Rev. Raymond D. Parent II
Inspired by sermons and lectures by Rev. Dr. David P. Scaer
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church

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