

Holy, Holy, Holy

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is a day in which the church celebrates God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Trinity Sunday is not just an Anglican celebration. It is also observed in the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

It is the one day in the church year when some churches say the Athanasian Creed. The Creed of St. Athanasius is one of three creeds affirmed by the church, the others being the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. The Athanasian Creed contains a lengthy statement about the nature of the Trinity.

It reads in part, "And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Spirit. ..." I hope that this clears up any difficulty you may have had in understanding the doctrine of the Trinity!

Actually, the Trinity is not that hard to grasp. There is one God. He has appeared in three distinct ways, as the Father, as Jesus the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. But it is the same God who appears in each of these three ways. The doctrine of the Trinity is intended to clarify that we do not believe in three Gods. There is one God who has manifested himself in three persons.

To use a simple analogy: When I was working and my children were young, I had three different roles: I was Alan the father at home, I was Alan the attorney at the office, and I was Alan the vestryperson at the church. But these were not three different Alans; I was the same human being performing three distinct roles. I was not Alan the father at the

office; I wasn't Alan the attorney at the church; and I wasn't Alan the vestryperson at home. (You can formulate your own analogy based on your life.) And there being only one Alan, and not three, I had certain core characteristics that I displayed throughout all of these roles. (I hope that one of them was honesty.)

God has many personal characteristics, but one of the principal characteristics of God is that God is Holy. We say this in our Communion Service in what is called the Sanctus. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory." This is one of the very earliest parts of our communion service. Where did the church get this statement?

If we recall the prophet Isaiah's vision of heaven, he wrote, "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:1-3) Our Sanctus is a quotation from the Book of Isaiah which we recite in our liturgy, joining our voices with those of the angels.

Isaiah was not the only one to have a vision of heaven and the angels. The Apostle John, in the Book of Revelation, said of his vision, "After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ... And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures ... each of them with six wings, ... and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (John 4:1-2, 6, 8)

In each of these visions of heaven, the angels say “Holy, holy, holy.” Did they say “holy” three times for emphasis, or does this reveal a fundamental truth about God, namely that the one true God consists of three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and each is holy. God the Father is holy. God the Son is holy. God the Holy Spirit is holy.

It is the very nature of God that he is holy. It is a defining characteristic of God. And when we study the Scriptures we see that not only is God holy, but wherever he is, that place is holy. When God called Moses out of the burning bush, God said, “Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then God said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy.” (Exodus 3:4-5) God is holy and he imparts holiness to wherever he is. Psalm 93:5 says, “Your decrees are very trustworthy; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.”

As a Christian community we are to be a house, a temple of God’s Holy Spirit, which means that we are to allow God to guide and direct our thoughts and actions. Those who profess Christianity but lead lives of deliberate sin are not under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit. They are not faithful Christians, no matter what they may claim regarding themselves and the faith.

God wants his people to be holy. He instructed Moses to give this message to the people. God said, “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’” (Leviticus 19:2)

But isn’t that impossible? Did God really mean that? That we should be holy? After all, nobody’s perfect, right? We might recall that Jesus, who is God, manifested as God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, said to his followers, “You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

How can we hope ever to attain to true holiness, to perfection? Let me suggest two keys to living a life of holiness: being born again, and being led by the Spirit.

In Chapter 3 of John's Gospel, we have the story of Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a good man, recognizing that Jesus was a teacher come from God. But Nicodemus was missing something needed to come into a full understanding of God and his kingdom. Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:5-6)

Nicodemus needed a spiritual renaissance, he needed to be reborn spiritually. Everyone who hopes to see the kingdom of God must be born of the Spirit. To be a true child of God, one must be born of God.

And having been **born** of God, born of the Spirit, we must be **led** by the Spirit. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Romans 8:14) We are not to disregard the Spirit and follow our own leading. And we are not to follow someone else's leading. We are to be led by the Holy Spirit of God.

On this Trinity Sunday, together with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we say "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, heaven and earth are full of your glory," remembering that God's will for us is that we too should be holy, that we should put on the righteousness of Christ by believing in him, accepting him as our Lord and Savior and walking in his way all of our lives, for he is God, in the person of Jesus the Son, the second person of the Trinity. He is true God of true God. And the Holy Spirit is with us to lead us into all righteousness.

In the prayers that we say from our Prayer Book, we often close the prayer with an acknowledgment of the Trinity. Our collect for today is

an example of that. In it, we conclude our prayer with “Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever.”

Let me close with the trinitarian blessing that the celebrant says at each communion service: The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always.