

Happy Hump Day!

THE HOLY TRINITY - 2017

St. Matthew 28:16-20

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Happy hump day everyone! This is the exact middle point of the church year. We've completed the festival half where we follow the life of Christ, from His Advent through His ascension, and then witness the baton being passed off in the Upper Room in Pentecost through the giving of the Holy Spirit. And after today, we have the long green season of the life of the church, as we contemplate not Christ's life, but His teachings.

But today? It's hump day - a day to celebrate, marvel, rejoice in the Mystery of the Triune God. It's a day that reminds us that the God who reveals Himself to us is not the kind of God we might cook up for ourselves.

I mean, we'd keep it simple, don't ya think? We'd work up either one God without the complications of three Persons (as Judaism, Islam and the Unitarians do), or we'd do many gods without the essential unity (as Buddhism and Hinduism and all forms of polytheism do). But this?

Nah, let's be honest - if we wanted to engineer a religion and convince the world that we have God's truth, we would not begin with a Deity that needs a non-sensical cooked up word like "triune" to describe Him, much less a creed like this to confess Him.

And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.

But man, you just have to love the Athanasian Creed! It leaves no stone unturned, no angle unexamined, no wiggle room for any alternative gods. It takes no prisoners. Written at the close of the 5th century after all the dust of four hundred years of debate had settled, it reflects the settled

understanding of who God is – with zero regard, of course, to marketability – three distinct Persons united together as one divine Being, distinguishable but not divisible. Sure, you can tell them apart – but you can't pull them apart – and you can't have them apart. But how the heck do you put all this on a bumper sticker!?

Well, you don't, because you can't. The good news is that

the whole thing hangs on Jesus. But ultimately He is the reason we are forced to speak of God in ways that stretch our mind to the snapping point. If the Son of God hadn't shown His face and taken on our humanity, had He never commanded the apostles to baptize "*in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*" had He never claimed to be I AM in the flesh, we wouldn't even have any of the Creeds, much less this one.

But when the man named Jesus claims to be the Son of God and God validates that claim by raising Him from the dead, well, that changed everything. The Lord is one. Yes. But that one is also three.

Jesus and the Father are not the same – He is the eternal Son sent by the Father in love to save the world. He prays to the Father as a distinct Person and yet says, "*I and the Father are one.*" He sends the Spirit from the Father and the Father sends the Spirit in His name. All of this comes from Jesus. And it all could be so easily dismissed. He could be brushed off as just some two bit demon-possessed carpenter's son with a huge ego complex, except for this one thing: IT'S ALL TRUE!

IT'S TRUE! Jesus died and rose bodily from the dead leaving an open, empty tomb and a bucket load of eyewitnesses.

IT'S TRUE! Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection at least three times before it happened.

And frankly, anyone who can pull that off needs to be heard. If Mark Zuckerberg gets to lecture the world about economic policy because he created a social media platform, how much more does Jesus get to speak to the entire universe when He suffered, died and ROSE from the grave! It is as they say, "It ain't bragging if you can actually do it! And Jesus did!

And so here today, on this hump day, we are not as much about explanation but celebration of the pure confession of who God is!

Dear saints of God, we have a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – undivided, uncreated, infinite, eternal, almighty – one God, one Lord in three distinct Persons. To have one is to have all. What one does, all do together, each according to His Person.

We try to speak of God's works – creation, redemption, and sanctification. But don't make the mistake of dividing the works among the Persons. The works of God are indivisible. And sometimes we tend to parcel out the works of God among the Persons – the Father creates, the Son redeems, the Spirit sanctifies. Nice and easy, right? Kind of like a baseball pitcher analogy – the Father is the starting pitcher who gets the game rolling, the Son is the middle reliever who clinches the game, and then the Holy Spirit is the closer who locks up the game with a save.

The problem? Scripture won't let us think that way. The Son was already busy in the beginning when God – Father, Son, and Spirit- made the heavens and the earth.

The book of Proverbs personifies the Son as holy Wisdom, the "craftsman" at the Father's side, begotten before all things, who as the creative Word together with the Spirit who blew over the waters of creation made all things, including Man. Each creative day was a delight to the Son. In fact, it was through the Son that God spoke His divine "good" over each day, rejoicing in the whole world, and a grand "very good" on the sixth day, delighting in mankind.

Redemption, the saving of creation from sin and death, is also the work of the Triune God. The Father sends the Son in love to become Man, the foremost creature, to be the new Adam and head of creation, and with Him comes the Spirit, descending visibly on Jesus at His baptism to mark Him as the One who has the Spirit without measure. He dismisses the Spirit at His death, the work of redemption being done, and then, risen from the dead, breathes out His Spirit, first on the apostles and then on the whole Church.

Sanctification, the work of our being made holy, is the work of the undivided Holy Trinity too. The Spirit delivers the cross-purchased gifts of our life and salvation from the Son to us by means of the word of Baptism, of the preached Gospel, of the Supper of the Son's Body and Blood. He calls us to faith, enlightens us with His gifts, gathers us into the Church, and brings us under the reign of the Son who brings us to the Father and presents us clothed in His own spotless holiness.

This is not simply the "catholic" (small c) Christian faith but the universal consensus of Christians from the beginning, from the teaching of the apostles themselves.

And it's significant that the Mystery of God's tri-unity is most clearly taught in the simple baptismal

mandate of Jesus precisely to them, since it is in Baptism that we learn who the triune God is and what He does to save us. Just as the Trinity was fully present and active in the baptism of Jesus – the Father speaking, the Spirit descending, the Son being baptized – so the same Triune God is present and active in your Baptism.

Now to our modern ears, the Athanasian creed seems unnecessarily ponderous, long, and repetitive. But that's because our modern confessions are sloppy, subjective, and sentimental. We want to be unique and put our own spin on things. "No one is going to tell me what to believe." But this creed stands in the way and says, pardon my English, "Hell no!" This creed demands: "Whoever wishes to be saved shall confess this catholic faith."

Christianity is not a "roll your own" religion! And it offers nothing new. The Athanasian creed is actually the new kid in town from the 5th century. You see, the catholic faith is not made up on the fly. It's not composed on Saturday night for us on Sunday morning. You want something new in your religion? Sorry, we've got nothing. The only things "new" are those who are dripping wet from that font and the squeaky clean behind the ears newly confirmed youngsters who believe and confess this catholic faith along with us.

And so the catholic faith is handed down from one generation to the next, from one believer to another. How? By baptizing and teaching.

Yes, it may seem all quite confusing, and you may leave here today scratching your heads going, huh? But in the end, our confession is not about our reason, sense, and ability to somehow put three and one together. Our confession is a gift of grace, of undeserved kindness on the part of God solely for the Son's sake. We are undeservedly given to know the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and to confess them in their tri-unity, and believe it faithfully and firmly. And this we do. Because IT IS ALL TRUE. And even our confession of that is a gift of God Himself.

You know, the beauty of the Athanasian Creed is not that it simplifies things – but precisely that it doesn't – the Athanasian Creed simply confesses God as He is. And when you think about it, with such a mystery, wouldn't it be rather odd if it was easy to understand?

But if you want to keep things simple – keep your eyes on Jesus.

The bottom line is that ultimately today is like any Sunday. It is all anchored in Jesus. You were baptized and are forgiven, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You begin and end each day in this Name. And when you breath your last, you will be buried in that Name in the joy and

hope of the resurrection of the body and eternal life in triune communion with God.

The bottom line: The Triune God is not an object to be scientifically dissected or mathematically explained, but worshipped and adored and called upon and trusted and proclaimed in all the world.

So... since hopefully you now understand the Athanasian Creed all the more, why don't we turn to p.319, rise, and confess it together one more time. (Just kidding, once is maybe enough for the day, but let's not wait a whole nother year to do so either!)

But for now, once again happy hump day. And...

Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the Undivided Unity.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.