

Trinity Sunday_YrB_053115_mcr
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning! Today is the first Sunday after Pentecost, also known as Trinity Sunday. It is an unusual Sunday, in that it is the only day in our calendar when we honor a doctrine, and also because that doctrine is so hard to describe we get lost in the worst sort of theological abstractions.

In the Western Church, we ascribe to what is known as the Creed of St Athanasius. You can find an English translation of it in the back of the Prayer Book, on page 864. (I suggest reading it sometime if you are having trouble falling asleep.) Part of this creed sounds like what we say in the Nicene Creed; but the bulk of it is about the Trinity.

Here is a brief excerpt from the section on the Trinity:

"Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.
The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate.
The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost
incomprehensible.
The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.
And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal.
As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one
uncreated, and one incomprehensible.
So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost
Almighty.
And yet they are not three Almighty, but one Almighty.
So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God.
And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord.
And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.
For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every
Person by himself to be both God and Lord,
So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion, to say, There be three Gods,
or three Lords.
The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten.
 The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created,
 nor begotten, but proceeding.
 So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy
 Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts."

Excerpt From: "Book of Common Prayer." iBooks. <https://itun.es/us/QmMnI.l>

Now, just so you'll know, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* calls this a "short, clear exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity." I'll leave that for you to decide!

The interesting thing to me about this creed and any of the other attempts at describing or explaining or celebrating the Trinity is the difference between the how the Western Church approaches the doctrine and the way the Eastern Church approaches it. In the West, we are all about intellectual abstraction. Give me a precise definition, with multi-syllabic words, and diagrams, with circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back of each one, and we can then understand it, right?

But Eastern theology emphasizes celebration of the mystery. The Eastern way has always been cautious of the limits of human language and the limitations of the human mind. One of the Desert Fathers once observed: "God cannot be grasped by the mind. If he could be grasped he would not be God." And St. John of Damascus wrote: "God then is infinite and incomprehensible; and all that is comprehensible about him is his incomprehensibility."

So, let's talk about the mystery part, shall we?

One of the ways the Eastern Church describes the Holy Trinity is as a dance - an intimate circle dance in which the three persons of the Trinity are joined together, rotating around one another. The dance goes on forever. The music swells, the tempo increases and there is always laughter and joy. Then the dance slows a bit and the music gets quieter, but still the dance goes on and no one tires out.

There is a multi-syllabic Greek word to go with this image: perichoresis. From 'peri-' as in 'around' - like 'perimeter', and 'choreo' - as in 'rotating' - like 'choreography'.

As you might imagine, we in the West have overanalyzed and pretty successfully taken most of the mystery out of the concept of perichoresis, ignoring the thought of a dance and turning it into another hefty theological tome. But a number of years ago, when faced with preaching on this same subject, I stumbled upon - of all things - a YouTube video - that described the Trinity in a way that captured my imagination and delighted me.

I have remembered it ever since.

Now, I don't expect that anyone here today who was here 5 years ago remembers this illustration - I am not that egocentric! But if you do remember it, please enjoy it with me again as I describe the video to you.

There is a man sitting in his small kitchen at the table - he is British, so he sounds very smart to me. First, he produces a piece of paper upon which he has written the word, *perichoresis*, in Greek, with a marker, saying that he will demonstrate it as the dance of the Holy Trinity.

There are six objects on the table:

The first...a pot of coffee, labeled **Father**...

the second, a carton of ice cream, labeled **Son**...

the third, a bottle of Bailey's Irish Cream, labeled **Holy Spirit**...

He says, 'what they do is they dance around each other, because they have so much love for the others, and they give themselves freely to the others, and then become one with each other and each lives within the other.'

The fourth object is a blender, labeled **perichoresis**.

He opens the blender, pours coffee into it, scoops some ice cream into it, and, finally, adds some Irish Cream (not too much, he says!). Then he says, "Each one is individual but they join themselves in love. So let's dance!"

He puts the top back on the blender, takes a **remote** in his hand, points it at something off-camera and clicks the power button, and says, "Start the dance!"

He punches the button on the blender. The blender grinds loudly and swirls around. He turns it off.

The introduction to a song is playing on the out-of-sight stereo...can you guess what it is? ...the band starts to sing... *I am he, as you are he, as you are me, and we are all together!*

He turns off the music, takes the last object, which is a glass with its label facing away from the camera, turns it around and pours the liquid in and says, "And what we are left with is the Trinity in one body, which is God."

(The label on the glass, which we can now read, says **God**.)

He says, "So the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make up God in one image." (He picks up the glass.) "Each retains their individuality." (He takes a big swallow from the glass.) "Aaahh! And that is divine!"

The important thing to remember about the Trinity is that it is all about community and hospitality. Those three persons - the community of the Trinity - is the community that creates and redeems and blesses each and every one of us and welcomes us to be part of the community as well. We've all been invited to the dance.

We are blessed so that we can be blessing to others. In the great 'blender' of the Godhead, there will be no outcasts, no outsiders. All of us are children of God...God's beloved.

Let us share God's gift of blessing with those we meet - and with ourselves - so that we all will know who we are and whose we are. Look at the faces you see and say, "You belong to God, who is community, who is the Divine Dance, who is Love." Tell them, "You are God's beloved." AMEN.

Here is the link to the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFWf5iMNFjA>