

Holy Trinity
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Minneapolis, Minnesota

✧ Jesu juva ✧

KNOWING GOD

Isaiah 6:1-7; Romans 11:33-36; John 3:1-15

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Despite what one might think, seeing the media coverage of the atheist convention in Minneapolis a few months ago or the numerous ongoing activities of the campus atheists group, most people actually do believe in God. According to polls conducted over the past few decades it seems that around 90 percent of people claim to believe in God; and that the figure hasn't varied much over the years. Unfortunately belief in God doesn't necessarily mean believing God. I can't tell you the number of conversations I've had with people that begin with someone saying, "I believe in God, but..." and then there's usually some denial of a fundamental doctrine of Christianity or a general kowtowing to the postmodern doctrines of inclusivity. After all, who can really say what God is like? And who would dare to claim that his or her own ideas about God are the only valid beliefs?

Well, for centuries the Christian Church has made those claims. We just confessed a few moments ago in the Athanasian Creed: "And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal..." And then, after expounding that statement in great detail we said: "He, therefore, that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity." I hope the force of these words struck you. The Church is not satisfied with belief in God. One must have a right belief in God. You must not only believe that God exists, but you must know Him as He actually is!

Ah, but how? How can one come to know God as He actually is? And even if you did succeed in accomplishing such a knowledge, how could you ever know for sure that you really had? You cannot climb up into heaven to see Him or meet Him face-to-face. You cannot discover the mystery of God through the use of philosophy or logic. You cannot rely on scientific inquiry here or mathematical formulae. Even if you were to have a vision, like that of Isaiah, there's no guarantee that you would come away from such an experience knowing God as He actually is. And what is impossible for the individual in these matters is also impossible for the Church. The councils that composed the Creeds in ancient times did not have any access to God through human endeavor, even though these were, for the most part, pious and holy men, bishops of Christ's Church. St. Paul sums the problem up today: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to Him?"

The fact of the matter is that no one can know God or believe rightly concerning Him, unless God reveals Himself. And this is why the Church speaks so forcefully about having a right belief in God; for God has revealed Himself so that we may know Him. Our Lord speaks about this today in the

Gospel lesson: “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” If you want to know God, then you must look to Him who has seen Him and who has knowledge of Divinity. So who is Jesus speaking about here? Himself, of course. He is the one who has from all eternity belonged in heaven. He is the one who has descended out of heaven for our salvation and become the Son of Man. And yet even as a man He carried heaven with Him and was found in it and it in Him. He is the one come from God, as the wise rabbi Nicodemus rightly said; and His miraculous works proved it, even to those who rejected His coming in the end. He is the God whom Isaiah saw in His heavenly vision: the King, the Lord of Hosts, and “the whole earth is full of His glory.” He is the very Son of God, concerning whom St. John writes: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

Only Christ Jesus knows God, being God Himself, and being in close relation with the Father and the Holy Spirit; a relationship that is more intimate than anything human beings can know, a relationship of shared being and substance; yet without loss of person. So He knows! He has more than first-hand knowledge of God, as if one were describing someone that one has met. He is One with Father and Spirit. He has the ultimate insider’s knowledge here. And He has come that we may know the Godhead and be restored to Him through the forgiveness of our sins and the redemption of our lives, body and soul. He is God’s self-revelation in His very person. And by His Word He brings us to a right knowledge of God. “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” And to His disciples Jesus said: “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.” And how did they know and see the Father? By knowing and seeing Christ. Again Jesus said: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” And concerning His Word, Jesus says: “the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.” Here is God’s self-revelation: the person and the Words of Christ. Again Jesus said to Nicodemus: “Most assuredly I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen.”



This speaking and testifying we must receive and believe if we are to know God rightly and be saved. And this too God gives and enables in us. Jesus says in John 6: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” And yet Jesus also says: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” So is one drawn by the Father to Christ so that one may by Christ come to the Father? Here, as we heard last week, is the Spirit’s work. For the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father is active through the Word of Christ, calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying. And we begin to see through Jesus’ own words concerning God, how God is in His very being. We see the Trinity; and we see that the Most Holy Trinity is active in love toward us.

We see this perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. I talk an awful lot about Baptism, if you haven’t noticed by now. And some of you have probably wondered why it is that I bring up baptism all of the time. The reason is actually pretty simple. Baptism defines our existence as Christians. It makes us who we are. It delivers grace from God that extends over and through our entire lives. It is where we first are put into Christ, into a relationship with God, and

where we first come to know God and His love for us. Here God is revealed through the words of Jesus: "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," as His saving work is performed in us through the power of the Holy Spirit applying Christ's redemption to each of us individually so that we are made holy and acceptable to the Father. Here we are born again of water and of Spirit, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. And being thus born, we are enabled by faith to see the Kingdom of God in Christ and in His Word, and will one day see it with our own eyes.

Being born of the Spirit, we are enabled to receive God's testimony. And this makes for a right belief and a right faith, so that we can say not just that we believe in God, but that we believe God and know Him. And by this faith, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are saved. He was lifted up for us on the cross and has died to purchase this grace for us. And now risen and ascended, He sends His Spirit to deliver it.

So do not fall for the idiotic postmodern all-inclusive gibberish about belief in God. And if you have espoused such nonsense or accepted in some way, put a stop to it. You know better. By Christ's mercy you hold the catholic faith; faith that worships "one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;" faith that is absolutely true; faith that knows God as He actually is; faith that brings salvation. Amen.

✧ Soli Deo gloria ✧