

The Holy Trinity
John 3:1-17

To know God the Father, you must know Jesus!

To know Jesus is to know God the Holy Spirit!

Our God is three Persons in one Unity. As We confess in the Athanasian Creed:

“Just as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so also are we prohibited by the catholic, [or universal,] religion to say that there are three Gods or Lords. The Father is not made nor created nor begotten by anyone. The Son is neither made nor created, but begotten of the Father alone. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding.”

In this part of the creed, you hear the language of compulsion and prohibition. We must confess, or speak, what Scripture confesses about our God. And we must not confess, or speak, what Scripture clearly prohibits. And that’s true whether we understand it or not. Let’s be clear. I can no more explain how the Trinity works any more than I can explain how Jesus is bodily present with His body and blood in mere consecrated bread and wine. How these two things work is not always clear, but what God says about His Supper and Himself is absolutely crystal clear.

Jesus says, “This is my body... this cup is the new covenant in my blood.” If you understand grammar at even the most basic level, you must acknowledge Jesus is saying the consecrated bread and wine are His body and blood.

Jesus says through Paul, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” The Greek grammar shows that you must answer both these questions with a ‘Yes.’ Yes. This is a participation in the blood of Christ. Yes! This is a participation in the body of Christ. Furthermore, Paul makes a point of highlighting both blood and body. If he meant it figuratively, it seems to me he would have used only the body instead of both the body and blood in his questions. Yet, we receive both blood and body.

And again, I cannot explain how that works!

Jesus says to Philip, “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father... Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.” (John 14:9, 11)

Philip had said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” (Jn 14:8) Here’s one of those time where you wish you could see Jesus’ face and heard the tone of His voice. He says, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip?” To see Jesus is to see the Father. Jesus adds a verse later, “I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does His works.” (Jn 14:10)

It's not like the persons of the Trinity hide from each other or act independently from each other. Think about Jesus’ resurrection. Peter says in Acts 2 that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. (v. 24) Peter just says ‘God’ but it’s obvious from the context that He means God the Father. Jesus clearly says to the Jews, “Destroy this temple, [that is His body,] and in three days I will raise it up.” (Jn 2:19) John, just to be sure you get it, says, “[Jesus] was speaking about the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this.” (Jn 2:21-22) God clearly says through Paul in Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. (v. 11)

So, you can clearly say that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. You can clearly say that Jesus raised Himself from the dead. And you can clearly say that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. Consequently, you can say that God raised Jesus from the dead, without specifying the person of the Trinity that did it.

But you cannot say that God the Father died for you. Nor can you say that God the Holy Spirit died for you. You can and must say that Jesus, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, died for you on the cross. But Jesus wasn’t alone on the cross until He was abandoned by His Father for your sin. One of my favorite pectoral crosses, which I used to have but was inadvertently taken by someone, is the “Brazilian” trinity clergy cross. It shows Jesus on the cross. It shows the Father above and behind Jesus holding His hands. It shows the Holy Spirit above the Father in His dove form. Certainly, only Jesus died on the cross, but all three persons of the Trinity suffered. The Father gave His Son over to crucifixion for your sin. The Holy Spirit indwelt Jesus and had to flee the Son He knew from eternity!

As we confess, God the Father always begets the Son, and the Son is always begotten of the Father. And the Holy Spirit is always sent by both the Father and the Son.

To know God the Father, you must know Jesus!

To know Jesus is to know God the Holy Spirit!

As we recently heard Jesus say, “[The Holy Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:14) The Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus, and we have that witness in the Holy Scriptures.

From the Holy Scriptures, we learn that the most important question for everyone in the world is the one that Jesus asks His disciples:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:13–18)

Who do you say that Jesus is?

If you get the answer right, you are part of the church against whom the gates of hell will not prevail! If you get the answer wrong, you will succumb to the gates of hell.

But, you might think, hasn't pastor continually said we cannot make a decision for Christ?

Absolutely. And thank you for paying attention.

Jesus addresses this when he says to Peter after his confession: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”

Who Jesus is must be revealed by God the Father which is what Jesus addresses in our Gospel reading today.

Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and 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.” (v. 5-6)

You were born naturally in the flesh. That is, you were born in bondage to sin after your father Adam. You prove this by sinning. The original sin that dwells in you, and, in and of itself is worthy of condemnation, bursts out in all manner of sinful thoughts, sinful words, and sinful deeds. The patriarchs proved it time and again. Israel proved it time and again, and you too prove it time and again. That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

Just to be clear, when Paul and I use the word “flesh” we mean body and soul. Original sin corrupts you body and soul. You sin in body and soul. Do not fall for the gnostic heresy that is so common in American Christianity that the soul is good, and the body is bad. You are corrupted by original sin in your body and your soul. I think we can see this clearly, if we think about it for a minute. Certainly, some sinful desires arise out of the body like gluttony, which breaks the fifth commandment, and all manner of sexual sins, which breaks the sixth commandment. I think it is also clear that these aren’t only bodily desires even though they are driven by the body. Your soul also desires to sin against your own body and the bodies of others. And just as certainly, some sinful desires arise out of the soul like idolatry, which breaks the first commandment, and covetousness, which breaks the ninth and tenth commandments. And conversely, I think we can see that idolatry and covetousness are driven by the soul but affected by the body as well. Idolatry and covetousness are certainly expressed by the tongue. Like James says, “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body... And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.” (James 3:2, 6) That which is born of the flesh, both body and soul, is flesh, both body and soul.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

You must be born again, or born from above. In the Greek, Jesus says you must be born *ἄνωθεν*. *ἄνωθεν* means “from above” and “again.” Most English translations use “again.” Both are correct. Jesus compares your spiritual birth to your natural birth. It’s very similar. And you might compare your death pains where your baptism is completed to birth pains. But Jesus says you must be born of Spirit and the water. That is, you must have the Holy Spirit come “from above” and give you a new man. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

And this is God's desire for you. It is God the Father's desire for you. It is God the Son's desire for you. And it is God the Holy Spirit's desire for you.

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.” (Jn 3:17)

Jesus paid for the sins of all people of all time. There is no reason someone must go to hell because Jesus has already paid the price for everyone's sin. This is why Paul describes the ministry of the church as a ministry of reconciliation:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling *the world* to Himself, *not counting their trespasses against them*, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17–19)

You are put into Christ in your Baptism. You are reconciled to God in your baptism so that you are, indeed, a new creation.

You will still feel the affects of age in your body. You will still die. Your new creation, or new man, is a new creation, but you're still stuck with the old creation until your death. I was at a man's deathbed on Friday. He is a grandpa of one of my classmates from seminary. He was a lapsed Roman Catholic and his daughter, who's taking care of him, goes to Sunrise. My classmate called and asked that I would go and see him. I saw him last Sunday and last Friday. Friday it was obvious, he is close to death. I prayed with him the commendation of the dying. It is a beautiful rite of our church that roots your death in your baptism, so you know you are ready to be received into heaven. Repeatedly, it has come to my mind that this is what today's Gospel is all about. Your blessed death in Christ.

It's not that we don't cherish life for we certainly do. God has given us so many wonderful first article gifts like food and books and medicine. But we know, like Solomon from Ecclesiastes, that if all you have is first article gifts, you are doomed and the first article gifts become bitter. But if you have the second article gift of redemption and the third article gift of sanctification, that is, being kept in the faith, then you can actually enjoy first article gifts.

Dying in the faith is the best gift of all and it's why we do what we do here at Grace. Everything we do from liturgy to hymnody. Everything from preaching to

Sacraments. These are meant to prepare you to die in the Lord. And if you die in the Lord, you will live forever in His presence.

Since Baptism is such a beautiful gift, let us strive to remember it daily so that we keep our eyes on Jesus and not all the junk going on around us. And Jesus gives you this testimony at the end of Revelation:

“Surely I am coming soon.”

Yes! Come, Lord Jesus!

Amen.