

The Holy Trinity  
St. Matthew 28:16-20

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

On this Holy Trinity Sunday, you are confronted once again with this sobering reality: the Church, and you a part of it, worship one God in Three Persons—the Father, uncreated, incomprehensible, eternal; the Son, uncreated, incomprehensible, eternal; the Holy Spirit, uncreated, incomprehensible, eternal. Yet, they are not three uncreateds, incomprehensibles, and eternals, but one. This is not the kind of god that man understands (He is, after all, incomprehensible); this is not the kind of god that man creates!

Nevertheless, this is the way God revealed Himself. God says to you in His Word, “I AM, and this is how I am.” He doesn’t add the caveat, “And you must fully understand it, too.” This side of eternity, no one will fully understand it. One may try to explain it using analogies, such as triangles and shamrocks and the Kool-aid Man, but even these do not allow for full comprehension and may even border on heresy, or fully cross over that border. No, He simply says, “I AM, believe it,” then gives the faith to believe it, so you, by faith, say, “Amen. Yes, yes, it is so.”

He says, “I AM.” God reveals Himself as Trinity. Certainly, you can search the Scriptures front to back and not find that term. You won’t find God outright declaring that which was confessed this morning in the Athanasian Creed as concisely and succinctly as that, but He does reveal His triune-ness. In the beginning, God spoke and things were; “Let us make...,” God said, and it was. (cf. Genesis 1:1—2:4) And when Jesus was walking the earth with His disciples, He had said, “I and My Father are one.” (John 10:30) And, by holy inspiration, the apostle John wrote in one of his letters, “[T]here are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one,” (1 John 5:7 NKJV) having once already referred to the Son as the Word. (cf. John 1:1-14)

Then, there is what Jesus said in today’s Gospel lesson, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” There is one Person of the Father, one Person of the Son, and one Person of the Holy Spirit; yet they are not three Gods, but one God. Likewise, what you heard in this verse from Matthew 28 is Jesus using the singular word “name” once and then three names—one God, Three Persons...

Confronted as you are with the truth of one God in Three Persons, you can do little else in faith than to acknowledge and rejoice in the name by which He reveals Himself—the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit—the name of one God in Three Persons.

It is a name in which to rejoice because of the promise associated with it: “[A]nd behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Where His name is placed, there is He present. And your one God in Three Persons is always at work in His Three Persons where He is present. Furthermore, where He is present in grace and mercy, He is there to bless.

And so, His name is invoked upon those activities one seeks to have blessed. Luther commends this practice when you rise from sleep and when you go to bed. For he wrote, “In the morning, when you wake up, make the sign of the holy cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Likewise, he also wrote, “In the evening, when you go to bed, make the sign of the holy cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Then, in both cases, He commends the use of the Apostles’ Creed—confessing the faith into which you have been Baptized, a constant reminder that God loves you and has done everything to save you from sin through Jesus Christ—and the Lord’s Prayer—to show you that your “lives are made holy by God’s Word that is received and believed”, directing “sinners where to find [their] help”, living “the holy life of faith in Jesus Christ.”

Then, in both cases again, He commends a morning and evening prayer, respectively, thanking and praising God for the blessings of the previous night or previous day—not the least of which is being kept safe from all harm and danger—asking for forgiveness of sins and that one may be kept free from sinning, and commending to God’s care for the coming day or night one’s body, soul, and all things—that the holy angel of God would be with the one praying, that the wicked foe may have no power over him.

And this is because where God’s name is, there He is present to bless. It is commended to begin each day and night in God’s name in order to seek His presence for the day and night and protection from all harm and danger—the things He has promised with His name. And, you cry out to Him because you believe in what He has promised.

Now, a warning must also be given. Yes, call upon God in Three Persons, revealed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit to invoke His presence and blessing on each endeavor, but you must also be warned against doing so upon those endeavors which God forbids, for He doesn’t reveal His Triune name as some sort of a magical incantation by which He automatically comes and blesses. You just confessed God to be incomprehensible, a reminder that God cannot put in a box or in a bottle to be called upon as if He were a genie. He reveals His name as His way of blessing you, not your way to use Him to bless any- and everything.

Yet through countless centuries, His name has been abused by those who would seek to use Him to bless their misdeeds. Take your pick of any of the second table commandments; each one of them has been broken in God’s name—dishonoring parents and authorities, murder, adultery, theft, lying, and coveting. In effect, the thought goes, “I am doing this to honor God,” or, “God wants me to do this, it honors Him.” And this is not limited to the second table. Excuses in God’s name are made for the commandments of the first as well—having another god or gods, misuse of God’s name, treating the holy day as any other.

In every case, one is putting themselves in God’s place in disregard His name (first and second commandments). Calling upon God’s name to justify your sin—to excuse it or claim that the sin is right—is blasphemy, and it calls God a liar. By doing so, you claim to have a grasp on God, whom you just confessed to be incomprehensible; and if He is incomprehensible, then He cannot be grasped, either by human thoughts or wills. You place yourself in command of God, placing Him at your beck and call—you place yourself in God’s place; that is to say, you have become your own god.

This is misuse of God’s name. That second commandment certainly comes into play in all of this. “We should fear and love God that we may not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.” Again, He reveals His name in order that He might be a blessing, not that you may use Him to bless what you choose to bless, here listed as cursing and swearing, using witchcraft, lying or cheating.

However, He gives His name to call upon in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks. And so, you ought to call upon His name in every trouble, such as was already done this morning. For, in gathering this morning, you called upon His name, and repented of your sins—confessing the trouble you have found yourselves in, confessing the trouble you have put yourselves in. Then, absolution was pronounced over you in God’s name. He is present to give to you and to hear from and to bless your repentance, and remains present to give you forgiveness as pronounced by His mouthpiece to you.

God’s Triune name is used in the absolution as a mark that all three Persons of the Trinity are at work in absolving you of your sins. The Father begot the Son who won the forgiveness that the Spirit proclaims. Or it could also be put as I have heard it said, “The Father has begotten the Son who sends the Spirit who proclaims the Son who brings you to the Father.” This is what happens again and again and again in confession and absolution.

And, as commended by Luther, it is commended to you again to make the sign of the holy cross at those times, remembering for one thing, that it was in the Son—God in the flesh—that God was most certainly and tangibly present to forgive, as He was led to a hill outside of Jerusalem and crucified—sacrificed for the sins of the world. For another, it retraces the sign of the cross put upon you at Baptism, marking you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.

And what a remarkable time that was, too, your Baptism. There, as was commanded in today's Gospel lesson, you were Baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. God's name was placed on you! You are His, therefore He is with you always. And from that moment (and for some, for many moments before), you have been catechized—taught to observe all things that Jesus has commanded.

Again, the Triune name is used signifying the presence of all Three Persons at work in Baptism. The Father is there, as at His only-begotten Son's baptism, and calls the Baptized His son whom He loves, a co-heir with His only-begotten Son. The Son is there as the Baptized's sins are washed onto Him, and He proclaims, "Now you have died My death, and you will be raised to life everlasting as I was raised on the third day." And the Spirit is there to give faith to receive God and all the blessings He has to give in all three Persons, sanctifying and keeping the Baptized in the one true faith.

Hear it again, dear Baptized, you are claimed. You have God's name placed on you, marked with the sign of the cross, marking you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. Therefore, you are blessed—you have the blessing of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this is His blessing, to know and do His will, to know and believe His Word, to lead a holy life according the Word of God taught in its truth and purity, the breaking of every evil counsel and will which would not let you hallow His name, to receive from Him every good and perfect gift and thank Him for it, and to hear, receive, and believe this: that you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.