

I speak to you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Have you ever watched a breaking news event on television in the moments after it happened? It can be painful to watch—and I can only imagine how it feels to be on the other side of the camera. We can guess that the reporter has been dispatched by her news director to the scene of some awful situation, and despite the fact that it's too early to report much of anything at that moment, she's thrust in front of the camera to share the details with us. She does that—shares what she knows—or doesn't know—and the station returns to its regular programming. Then, just a few minutes later, they break in again to give you the latest. That happens again and again, and what you get instead of an informative news report is a reporter who knows nothing more than she did the last time she was on the air and fumbles to find different words to say the same thing she said earlier. After a while, it becomes irritating for the viewer and obviously embarrassing for the reporter.

Well...here we are on the First Sunday After Pentecost, celebrating Trinity Sunday as we do each year on this day, a festival day on which we give thanks for the three persons of the Trinity and the Trinitarian doctrine that is a critical component of our faith despite the fact that one in three and three in one is a concept of truth but not a concept of fact. I find myself identifying with a quote I read from an unnamed seminary professor who said the preacher opens a Trinity Sunday sermon apologizing for his ignorance of the subject before spending the next twenty minutes demonstrating that ignorance. I promise you that my attempt will not last twenty minutes, but I cannot promise you that my ignorance won't be obvious!

It's not our fault, really, the preacher's inability to explain our belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are together one God. After all, it's one of the mysteries of our faith, just as it was in the early centuries of Christianity when theologians incorporated it into the creeds that define what we believe. The Trinity isn't a television mystery series where the facts will come together at the end of the program and every question will be answered and we can find relief in our understanding. Perhaps we'll understand this concept of "three in one" more fully when we enter into life everlasting; but for now we just have to accept that it's beyond our ability to comprehend. That can be hard for us. We don't live very easily in the unknowing, us contemporary Christians, because we live in an age of science and logic. We like to have everything laid out before us so that the sum of all parts gives us the grand total. Our imaginations have been dulled; we are no longer able to vividly envision that which we cannot explain; the Trinity, for example.

When it comes to imagining God, well, that might be a problem, too. From the time we're old enough to begin learning about God, the images are provided for us in art, through scripture, in the well-meaning descriptions of Christian Formation teachers who teach us in the way they have been taught, describing the indescribable within a framework that becomes a box in which to enclose God. Recently a parishioner shared with me that her three year-old granddaughter has a new friend. Although I don't remember the description of this friend as accurately as her grandmother did, the details were there—size, age, hair color, gender, even a name; all of those things one would know about a friend. As you might have guessed, the friend is imaginary, and not the first imaginary friend this child has had. What a gift the imagination is! It is essential to our acceptance of God as all powerful and all-knowing, the one who created us, who redeems us, who sustains us, in the meanings those words have for us collectively as believers, and individually in our similar and unique lives of faith.

Certainly the Prophet Isaiah had an imagination! We hear it in much of what he's written as a testament to God's glory, and today's passage is no exception. Close your eyes for just a moment, clear your mind, and listen to these words: "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty...and the hem of his robe filled the temple...Seraphs hovered above him...each had six wings...with two

they covered their faces...with two they covered their feet...with two they flew...the pivots on the thresholds shook...the house filled with smoke... It is only with our imaginations that we can comprehend what Isaiah wishes for us to know: there is nothing, no one, greater than God. "Woe is me," Isaiah says, from his awe and bewilderment. And in his own way, Nicodemus echoes the sentiment. "How can these things be?" Surely that is our question as we try to understand the concept of the Trinity.

There's a story about the great bishop, St. Augustine, who wrote *On the Trinity* around 419 C.E. The story says that one day Augustine was walking on the seashore trying to figure out how God can be one and yet Three. Then he saw a child carrying water in a cup to a small hole dug in the sand. "What are you doing?" asked the bishop. The child replied, "I'm trying to pour the ocean into this hole." The bishop laughed and said, "That is impossible." The child looked up into St. Augustine's eyes and said, "It is no more impossible than for you to put Almighty God into your small mind." Human beings cannot know the answer to Nicodemus' question, "How can these things be?" If we could, we would be as great as God.

But there *are* some things we can know about the Trinity, and they fill our hearts with faith and thanksgiving and at least some small understanding of the persons who are three yet one. In Book Eight of Augustine's *On the Trinity*, he begins by stating these simple hypotheses:

- * the greatness of the father plus the greatness of the son equals the greatness of the holy spirit.
- * the greatness of the son plus the greatness of the holy spirit equals the greatness of the father.
- * the greatness of the father plus the greatness of the holy spirit equals the greatness of the son.

In these hypotheses, which we believe to be truth, is our take-away from the doctrine of the Trinity: that is, how we are to live with one another in community in the church. Each of us brings different attributes to our relationship within the Body of Christ; yet none of us is more important than the other. In fact, without each other, none of us could be complete. Through the example of the Trinity, we are invited to live in relationship with each other, complimenting each other's gifts with our own gifts, supporting each other's lives with our own lives, always seeking to know and affirm one another, just as the three persons of the Trinity know and affirm each other. In each other, and in our relationships with each other, by using our imaginations, we can understand how God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit live together as one.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "we speak of what we know; and bear witness to what we have seen." Perhaps it isn't always that easy! On this Sunday when we ponder and reflect on the triune relationship of the living God, may we also ponder and reflect on our relationship with each other. And as we live together in God, through Christ, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may our relationship reflect the example given us in the three persons of the Trinity—collectively, a community of faithful, living in faith. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*