

SAINT PAUL'S CHURCH

Trinity 1
June 6, 2021

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us

In the Name ✠ of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

This Sunday past, we celebrated and confessed the greatest truth concerning God. We affirmed what God's people have always affirmed from the beginning in the Old Testament, that God is One. Further, we affirm what Jesus Christ revealed to us in the New Testament, that the One God exists eternally in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This truth is both the crown and foundation of all Christian doctrine. Once we affirm the truth of the Holy Trinity by Faith, we can look back and see how this truth grounds all the other truths we affirm and hold fast.

In the Epistle lesson, St. John extols the love of God so much so that he says, "God is Love." Love however, is not a passive state. Love is active. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost eternally exist in Love. St. Augustine uses Love as the analogy for the Trinity. The Father is the Lover, the Son is the Beloved, and the Holy Ghost is the Love between them. This Love is the Life of God which animates and vivifies all of Creation. You, me, and the entire universe continues working only because of the Love of God actively upholding it, actively breathing in new life every single moment. The human heart beats naturally moment by moment, only because the supernatural, eternally existing God, stands behind it calling it to beat moment by moment. The Psalmist says,

*27 These wait all upon thee, * that thou mayest give them meat in due season.*

*28 When thou givest it them, they gather it; * and when thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good.*

*29 When thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: * when thou takest away their breath, they die, and are turned again to their dust.*

*30 When thou lettest thy breath go forth, they shall be made; * and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.*

*31 The glorious majesty of the LORD shall endure for ever; * the LORD shall rejoice in his works.*

The perfect God, who is Love, and is blessed in Himself, who needs nothing outside of Himself, chooses freely to create all things. Why? Was God lonely? No. God lacks nothing, and He eternally exists in Three Persons. Was God bored? No. God does not change. St. Athanasius, one of the Great Bishops and Doctors of the Church, and the greatest defender of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Church history also asks this question. He says, God created as an outpouring of His love, that His creatures, angels and men might share in that Love which God enjoys.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us,

We had not yet existed, but God loved us by creating all things, including our own selves in the wombs of our mothers, and maintaining and preserving our lives moment by moment, but St. John does not have the Creation in view. God's love goes further still. He not only creates all things, but sends the Son to take our nature in order to save all things.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. ¹⁰ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The Son of God, Jesus Christ, loved us before we loved Him. Not only before we existed, but even while we were yet sinners and alienated from Him. Christ died for us as a propitiation, as a sacrifice and satisfaction for all of our sins in order to do what? *that we might live through him.* The Love of God is the Life of God. If we are to have everlasting life, then we must love God. We love God by His Spirit dwelling in us and perfecting our love. *Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.* The love of God gives us boldness on the last day because, ultimately, God makes us like Himself, and we will be able to recognize Him with joy. The Church and the individual Christian becomes the vessels that Love and Life of God are carried to all of the world.

Yet, if we're being honest with ourselves, how many of you would feel bold on the Day of Judgment? It's almost a silly question, but I think it's important too. None of us would be eager to say "I'm ready to behold God. I have been perfected in Love." If the Scriptures describe the fear that people felt in beholding an angel, how much more ought we think of beholding God Almighty when it's time to give account.

Here is the turn in the homily. If I were preaching a sermon I might have heard growing up or in seminary, I would say,

“Thank God for Jesus Christ, who covers our imperfections, because we obviously *can't* behold God because we obviously *haven't* been perfected in Love. Because I know you all, and you all know me. But that's okay, just believe, have faith, etc. and God will be satisfied, Jesus will save you, and *then* you'll be perfected. Amen, brother Ben. Let's receive communion and then go eat.”

Now there is some truth in this kind of homily: Jesus does save us, takes away our sins, etc. But that sermon is not what the Scripture says here. St. John says because *we are as he is in this world*. God is working to make you like Himself through the Life of the Son of God by the power of the Holy Ghost. God is interested in doing more to you and with you than taking away your sins. However, too often we're more interested in the love of God as far as the “being saved from death and hell” part, and move on too quickly from the love of God who “dwelleth in us.” Because our love is too often centered around the world and not He Who Upholds the World by the word of His power.

In the Gospel lesson there is a nameless rich man. Tradition has called him Dives, which comes from the Latin Vulgate Bible and means “Rich man”. He is nameless because he represents all of us, or at least those who live in the world without regard to Love. Certainly, we would expect such a nobleman as Dives to attend to all of his duties: religious and otherwise, but Dives did not love. Dives was not a degenerate, but he still went to hell. He did not love God because he refused to love Lazarus. By dismissing Lazarus, he dismisses his own soul. Dives chose to love mammon: the riches and pleasures of this world, rather than God. Even in his torments he thought of his earthly need to quench his thirst, his earthly family, and even his earthly station when he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to him. His love for the things of the earth without regard to God chained him. All the activity of his life was centered around the love of these earthly things. God graciously gave Dives every chance to love by placing Lazarus before him at the gate. God made Dives heart beat day after day, but no dice, he was dull towards the love of God.

St. Benedict in his monastic Rule tells us that, “Nothing is to be preferred to the work of God.” This is to say “Nothing is to be preferred to the [love] of God” in a different way. Benedict means the work of God in terms of prayers and the service of the Church. Nothing is to be preferred to worshipping God on Sunday. Receiving the

Eucharist, and thereby receiving the Love and Life of God, confessing our sins that we might be restored to the Love and Life of God. That we may go out and love our neighbors as Christ says in the Gospel or our brothers as St. John says in the Epistle lesson for today; because in these acts of love and devotion towards God and our neighbor, we are filled with the presence of God. The Spirit works within us by these means of grace which He has given. He perfects us in Love.

The Love of God calls us to a different life. A life so different that St. Paul describes the life as being “new creatures.” The old earthly life, desires, ambitions, sins, trespasses, debts, and rebellions are put away in Christ and He makes us new by giving to us the Love of God. What grace we have received! Christ gives us God Himself, that we might be perfected in love after His likeness. That on the last day we may have the promised boldness that John speaks of.

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He loved us by creating us, redeeming us, and now renewing us to Life in Him by the indwelling Spirit. We ought not be satisfied with less than the perfection of our love for God because we ought not be satisfied with anything less than God. Don't settle for earthly loves, there is grave danger for the soul, but in turning to Christ there is every grace needful: forgiveness of sins, strengthening of the soul, and the Love of God which sustains the Life of all things. Do not prefer anything to the work of God. For in Him is our life.

In the Name ✠ of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*