

Romans 8:14-17

In the past few months we have celebrated our Lord's death and resurrection for us, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. We have celebrated "events in history." Today is also a celebration, but not of a particular event. On Trinity Sunday the church celebrates an article of doctrine, a teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Today we are reminded that the church teaches arithmetic differently than the world does. Confessing the Athanasian Creed, we confess the truth that when it comes to God, $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. There are three Persons in the Godhead, but only one God. This is a profound mystery; one that we simply are unable to understand, because we don't do arithmetic that way. We don't understand how God can be Triune (three in one), but we do believe it, because the Scriptures teach it. And on this Sunday in the Church Year, pastors are supposed to teach it to their congregations, which is not an easy thing to do. It's not easy preaching about the essence of God without the sermon turning into a lecture more suited for a seminary classroom than for a pulpit.

I think we can compare our understanding of the essence of God with that of a newborn child grasping the concept of parents. A newborn child has a mother, but he doesn't understand at all what a mother is. Yet, he does nurse from her breasts as he cuddles near her beating heart. He has a father, but he doesn't understand what a father is. Yet, he feels safe in his strong arms. A newborn baby really has no cognitive understanding of what it means to be a part of a family, but he is a part of the family anyway. His mother and father love him and care for him not because he understands these things, but because he is their child.

You are God's child, says St. Paul in our text. God has done this. He has made you His child in the waters of Holy Baptism. Therefore we cry, "Abba, Father,"—not a cry of fear, but a cry of faith. When you were baptized, you trusted in God even though you did not understand Him. As a newborn child, born to God through Baptism, you had no grasp in your mind of the concept that God is Triune—that He is three Divine Persons but only one God. And yet, He nursed you on the pure milk of His Word. He spoke tenderly to you through the mouths of Christian parents and pastors. His strong arms held you close to His heart, beating with love for you, keeping you safe.

Before a child ever begins to understand what parents are and what it means to be a part of a family, the child learns to trust his mother and father; he learns to feel safe with them; to depend upon them for everything. A child does not first learn who his parents are and then say, "I think I'll love and trust you because you are my parents." No. Rather, because of what his mother and father do for him; because they love him, and feed him, and protect him, the child cannot help but love them, and trust them in return. And as he grows in years, only then does he come to understand the essence of what a parent is.

You, friend, are God's child not because you understand the Athanasian Creed, but because you confess it. Your place in God's family, the Church, is not based upon how well you grasp the concept that God is Triune, but it's because God has grasped you in Holy Baptism. A child first trusts, before his mind understands. You are a Christian not because of your mind's understanding, but because you trust in God. The moment the water was sprinkled upon you at the font, you trusted in Jesus Christ—you believed that He is your living Lord and Savior. A child trusts even without understanding. You did not yet know

in your mind that Jesus was born of a virgin; that He died upon a cross; that He rose on Easter morning—and yet you trusted in Him. You had faith—the faith as of a newborn child clinging to his mother and father even though he does not know their names or anything about them. He will in time, but faith and trust in his parents is not about what he knows in his mind, but comes because they love him and care for him as their child.

And in time you learned about this God whom you trusted. You were taught at the feet of Christian parents and teachers what God did for you—that He created you; that your Heavenly Father preserves you; that He sent His Son to die for you; that He also rose from the dead so that you have life in Him; that the Father and Son sent forth the Holy Spirit to make you a Christian, to give you faith and keep you in the faith; you learned to love God's Word and Sacraments where He comes to bless you with forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And so it is good that we who are God's children learn about His essence; that He is Triune—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and yet only one God. For as a child, over time, learns about his parents, so we desire to learn about our loving God. And one thing a child will learn is that his parents expect him to obey them. As a member of the family, he is to live in such a way that the family name is not shamed and dishonored.

And so with us. God called you into His family through Holy Baptism and, there, gave you His name, not so you and I can live however we please, but live to please Him. This we have not done. We have brought shame to our Christian name by our selfish living. Because of our lust and covetousness, our sinful pride and arrogance, you and I do not even deserve to be a part of God's family. We have dishonored Him by our behavior.

What is a child to do when he disobeys his parents? He can only confess his guilt and let his mother and father discipline him as they see fit. And because they love him; because he is their child, they forgive him. If sinful parents can forgive their sinful children, then how much more doesn't a righteous and loving God forgive us? He does not disown you when you disobey Him—He restores you to your place in the family. He is not ashamed of you when you live selfishly—He forgives you. He does not harbor evil in His heart toward you—He has only mercy and love there for you. Because He is your God, and you, through Holy Baptism are His child, He will never reject you; He will never kick you out of His House. He gives you what you do not deserve—He gives you pardon for your sins. Why? Because as you learned, your Savior, Jesus Christ died on a cross for you.

And when this life is over He gives you heaven with Him. This is because you are, as St. Paul says in Romans 8, "heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ." You inherit everything because you are God's child. Everything Christ has is yours—a glorified body, eternal life, a place in heaven—this is your inheritance as children of God through Jesus Christ. Just as children inherit everything that belongs to their parents, so God gives you everything that belongs to Him. He holds nothing back. Every treasure of His grace is yours in Christ. And you know, it's all yours not because you understand it in your mind, but because you have a place in God's family.

There are many things about God that we simply will not understand this side of heaven. Do not let this concern you. Keep learning. Keep studying His Word. Have a desire to know Him who gave Himself for you. But above all, be assured that the Triune God is your God who has made you His child, and who loves you, and forgives you, and gives you

every blessing in Christ...not because you have a good grasp in your mind of who He is, but because He, through His Word and Sacraments, has a loving and merciful grasp on you. Amen.