

TRINITY SUNDAY

Romans 11:33-36

The Holy Trinity

Romans 11:33-36 K.J.V.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

1. This epistle is read today because the festival of Holy Trinity, or of the three persons of the Godhead - which is the prime, great, incomprehensible and chief article of faith - is observed on this day. The object of its observance is that, by the Word of God, this truth of the Godhead may be preserved among Christians, enabling them to know God as he would be known. For although Paul does not treat of that article in this epistle, but touches on it only in a few words in the conclusion, nevertheless he would teach that in our attempts to comprehend God we must not speculate and judge according to human wisdom, but in the light of the Word of God alone. For these divine truths are too far above the reach of reason ever to be comprehended and explored by the understanding of man.

2. And although I have, on other occasions, taught and written on this article fully and frequently enough, still I must say a few words in general concerning it here. True, it is not choice German, nor has it a pleasing sound, when we designate God by the word "Dreifaltigkeit" (nor is the Latin, Trinitas, more elegant); but since we have no better term, we must employ these. For, as I have said, this article is so far above the power of the human mind to grasp, or the tongue to express, that God, as the Father of his children, will pardon us when we stammer and lisp as best we can, if only our faith be pure and right. By this term, however, we would say that we believe the divine majesty to be three distinct persons of one true essence.

3. This is the revelation and knowledge Christians have of God: they not only know him to be one true God, who is independent of and over all creatures, and that there can be no more than this one true God, but they know also what this one true God in his essential, inscrutable essence is.

4. The reason and wisdom of man may go so far as to reach the conclusion, although feebly, that there must be one eternal divine being, who has created and who preserves and governs all things. Man sees such a beautiful and wonderful creation in the heavens and on the earth, one so wonderfully, regularly and securely preserved and ordered, that he must say: It is impossible that this came into existence by mere chance, or that it originated and controls itself; there must have been a Creator and Lord from whom all these things proceed and by whom they are governed. Thus God may be known by his creatures, as St. Paul says: *"For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity."*

Rom 1, 20. This is (a posteriori) the knowledge that we have when we contemplate God from without, in his works and government; as one, looking upon a castle or house from without, would draw conclusions as to its lord or keeper.

5. But from within (a priori) no human wisdom has been able to conceive what God is in himself, or in his internal essence. Neither can anyone know or give information of it except it be revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. For no one knoweth, as Paul says (I Cor 2, 11), the things of man save the spirit of man which is in him; even so the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God. From without, I may see what you do, but what your intentions are and what you think, I cannot see. Again, neither can you know what I think except I enable you to understand it by word or sign. Much less can we know what God, in his own inner and secret essence is, until the Holy Spirit, who searcheth and knoweth all things, yea, the deep things of God - as Paul says above - reveals it to us: as he does in the declaration of this article, in which he teaches us the existence in the divine majesty of the one undivided essence, but in such manner that there is, first, the person which is called the Father; and of him exists the second person called the Son, born from eternity; and proceeding from both these is the third, namely, the Holy Spirit. These three

persons are not distinct from each other, as individual brothers or sisters are, but they have being in one and the same eternal, undivided and indivisible essence.

6. This, I say, is not discovered or attained to by human reason. It is revealed from heaven above. Therefore, only Christians can intelligently speak of what the Godhead essentially is, and of his outward manifestation to his creatures, and his will toward men concerning their salvation. For all this is imparted to them by the Holy Spirit, who reveals and proclaims it through the Word.

7. Those who have no such revelation, and who judge according to their own wisdom, such as the Jews, Turks and heathen, must consider the Christian's declaration the greatest error and rankest heresy; they must say that we Christians are mad and foolish in imagining that there are three Gods, when, according to all reason - yea, even according to the Word of God - there can be but one God. It would not be reasonable, they will say, that there should be more than one householder over the same house, more than one lord or sovereign over the same government; much less reasonably should more than one God reign over heaven and earth. They imagine that thus with their wisdom they have completely overthrown our faith and exposed it to the derision and scorn of all the world. As if we were all block-heads and egregious fools and could not see their logic as well as they! But, thank God, we have understanding equal to theirs, and can argue as convincingly, or more so, than they with their Alkoran and Talmud, that there is but the one God.

8. Further, we know, from the testimony of Holy Writ, that we cannot expound the mystery of these divine things by the speculations of reason and a pretense of great wisdom. To explain this, as well as all the articles of our faith, we must have a knowledge higher than any to which the understanding of man can attain. That knowledge of God which the heathen can perceive by reason or deduce from rational premises is but a small part of the knowledge that we should possess. The heathen Aristotle in his best book concludes from a passage in the wisest pagan poet, Homer: There can be no good government in which there is more than one lord; it results as where more than one master or mistress attempts to direct the household servants. So must there be but one lord and regent in every government. This is all rightly true. God has implanted such light and understanding in human nature for the purpose of giving a conception and an illustration of his divine office, the only Lord and Maker of all creatures. But, even knowing this, we have not yet searched out or fathomed the exalted, eternal, divine Godhead essence. For even though I have learned that there is an only divine majesty, who governs all things, I do not thereby know the inner workings of this divine essence himself; this no one can tell me, except, as we have said, in so far as God himself reveals it in his Word.

9. Now we Christians have the Scriptures, which we know to be the Word of God. The Jews also have them, from whose fathers they have descended to us. From these, and from no other source, we have obtained all that is known of God and divine works, from

the beginning of the world. Even among the Turks and the heathen, all their knowledge of God - excepting what is manifestly fable and fiction - came from the Scriptures. And our knowledge is confirmed and proven by great miracles, even to the present day. These Scriptures declare, concerning this article, that there is no God or divine being save this one alone. They not only manifest him to us from without, but they lead us into his inner essence, and show us that in him there are three persons; not three Gods or three different kinds of divinity, but the same undivided, divine essence.

10. Such a revelation is radiantly shed forth from the greatest of God's works, the declaration of his divine counsel and will. In that counsel and will it was decreed from all eternity, and, accordingly, was proclaimed in his promises, that his Son should become man and die to reconcile man to God. For in our dreadful fall into sin and death eternal, there was no way to save us excepting through an eternal person who had power over sin and death to destroy them, and to give us righteousness and everlasting life instead. This no angel or other creature could do; it must needs be done of God himself. Now, it could not be done by the person of the Father, who was to be reconciled, but it must be done by a second person, with whom this counsel was determined and through whom and for whose sake the reconciliation was to be brought about.

11. Here there are, therefore, two distinct persons, one of whom becomes reconciled, and the other is sent to reconcile and becomes man. The former is called the Father, being first in that he did not have his origin in any other; the latter is called the Son, being born of the Father from eternity. To this the Scriptures attest, for they make mention of God's Son; as, for instance, in Psalm 2, 7: "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee;" and again, Galatians 4, 4: "*But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son,*" etc. From this it necessarily follows that the Son, who is spoken of as a person, must be distinct from the person of the Father.

12. Again, in the same manner, the Spirit of God is specifically and distinctively mentioned as a person sent or proceeding from God the Father and the Son; for instance, God says in Joel 2, 28: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh," etc. Here a spirit is poured out who is God's, or a divine spirit, and who must be of the same essence, otherwise he could not say, "my Spirit;" and yet he must be a person other than he who sent him or who pours out. Again, because when he was sent he manifested himself, and appeared in his descent in a visible form, like that of a dove or tongues of fire, he must be distinct in person from both the Father and the Son.

13. But in this article of faith, in which we say that the Son of God became man and that he was of the same nature as we ourselves are, in order that he might redeem us from sin and death and give us eternal life without any merit or worthiness of our own, we give Jews and Turks no less occasion for laughter and mockery than when we speak of the three persons. For this is a more absurd assertion by far, in the estimation of human reason, which speculates in its Jewish and Turkish - yea, heathenish - teachings, on this wise: God is an only, almighty Lord of all, who has created all men and given them the

law according to which they are to live; accordingly it follows that he will be merciful to the good and obedient, but will condemn and punish the disobedient. Therefore, he who does good works and guards himself against sin, God will reward. These are nothing but heathenish conclusions drawn from earthly, worldly experience and observation, as if God's government must be conducted on the same principles as that of a father among his children and domestics; for those are considered good rulers and masters who make a distinction with regard to their own interests.

14. Such heathen ideas of wisdom, holiness and service of God are taught and practiced by the Pope. And so we believed, myself and others, while we were under him, not knowing any better; otherwise we would have done and taught differently. And, in fact, he who has not this revelation and Word of God, can neither believe nor teach other than pagan doctrine. With such a faith, how much better were we than the heathen and Turks? Yea, how could we guard ourselves against any deception and lying nonsense that might be offered as good works and as service of God? Then we had to follow every impostor who came with his cowl and cord, as if Christ were represented in him; and we thought that in the observance of these things we would be saved. So the whole world was filled with naught but false service of God - which the Scriptures properly call idolatry - the product of human wisdom, which is so easily deceived by that which pretends to be a good work and to be obedience to God. For human wisdom knows no better; and how could it know better without the revelation? Even when the revelation was proclaimed, human wisdom would not heed it, but despised it and followed its own fancies. Hence it continued to be hidden and incomprehensible to such wisdom, as Saint Paul says: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord?"

15. But to us this counsel and mind of God in giving his Son to take upon himself our flesh, is revealed and declared. For from the Word of God we have the knowledge that no man of himself can be righteous before God; that our whole life and all our deeds are under wrath and condemnation, because we are wholly born in sin and by nature are disobedient to God; but if we would be delivered from sin and be saved, we must believe on this mediator, the Son of God, who has taken our sin and death upon himself, by his own blood and death rendering satisfaction, and has by his resurrection, delivered us. In this truth we will abide, regardless of the ridicule heaped upon us because of such faith, by heathen wisdom, which teaches that God rewards the pious. We understand that quite as well, if not better, than heathenism does. But in these mysteries we need a higher wisdom than our own minds have devised or can devise, a wisdom given to us by grace alone, through divine revelation.

16 For it is not our intention thus to pry into the counsel, thoughts and ways of God with our understanding and opinions, and to be his counselors, as they do who meddle in the affairs that are the prerogative of the Godhead, and who even dare, in the face of this passage of Saint Paul, to refuse to receive or learn of God, but would impart to him that for which he must recompense again. And thus they make gods after their own fancy, as many gods as they have thoughts; so that every shabby monastic cowl or self-appointed

work, in their estimation, accomplishes as much and passes for as much as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in their eternal divine counsel, determine and accomplish. And they continue to be nothing but wearers of cowls and instructors in works, which works even they can do who know nothing of God and are manifestly scoundrels. And even though they have long been occupied with these things, they still do not know how matters stand between themselves and God. And it will ever be true as Saint Paul says: *"For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counselor?"*

17. For your own theories - which are no more than what anyone can arrive at, conjecture or conceive in his own mind, without divine revelation - are not a knowledge of the mind of God. And what does it avail if you are not able to say more than that God is merciful to the good and will punish the wicked? Who will assure you that you are good and that you are pleasing to God with your papistic, Turkish monkery and holiness? Is it all that is necessary to assert: God will reward with heaven such as are faithful to the order? No, dear brother, mere presumption, or an expression of your opinion, will not suffice here. I could do that as well as you. Indeed, each may devise his own peculiar idea; one a black, and another a gray monk's cowl. But we should hear and know what God's counsel is, what is his will and mind. This none can tell you by his own understanding, and no book on earth can teach it except the Scriptures. These God himself has given, and they make known to us that he has sent his Son into the world to redeem us from sin and the wrath of God, and that whosoever believes in him should have everlasting life.

DIVINE MYSTERIES INEXPLICABLE TO REASON.

18. Behold, Paul's purpose in this epistle is to show Christians that these sublime and divine mysteries - that is, God's actual divine essence and his will, administration and works - are absolutely beyond all human thought, human understanding or wisdom; in short, that they are and ever will be incomprehensible, inscrutable and altogether hidden to human reason. When reason presumptuously undertakes to solve, to teach and explain these matters, the result is worthless, yea, utter darkness and deception. If anything is to be ascertained, it must be through revelation alone; that is, the Word of God, which was sent from heaven.

19. We do not apply these words of Paul to the question of divine predestination for every human being - who will be saved and who not. For into these things God would not have us curiously inquire. He has not given us any special revelation in regard to them, but refers all men here to the words of the Gospel. By them they are to be guided. He would have them hear and learn the Gospel, and believing in it they shall be saved. Therein have all the saints found comfort and assurance in regard to their election to eternal life; not in any special revelation in regard to their predestination, but in faith in Christ. Therefore, where Saint Paul treats of election, in the three chapters preceding this text, he would not have any to inquire or search out whether he has been predestinated or not; but he holds forth the Gospel and faith to all men. So he taught before, that we are saved through faith in Christ. He says (Rom 10, 8): *"The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth,*

and in thy heart,” and he explains himself by saying that this word should be proclaimed to all men, that they may believe what he says in verses 12 and 13: “For the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon him: for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

20. But he speaks of the marvelous ruling of God in the Church, according to which they who have the name and honor of being the people of God, and the Church - the people of Israel - are rejected on account of their unbelief. Others, on the other hand, who formerly were not God's people, but were unbelieving, are now, since they have received the Gospel and believe in Christ, become the true Church in the sight of God, and are saved. Consequently it was on account of their own unbelief that the former were rejected. Then the grace and mercy of God in Christ was offered unto everlasting life, and without any merit of their own, to all such as were formerly in unbelief and sin, if only they would accept and believe it. He declares: *“For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.”* Rom 11, 32.

21. Hereupon follows the text, which Saint Paul begins with emotions of profound astonishment at the judgment and dealings of God in his Church, saying: *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!”*

22. Sublime are the thoughts and counsel of God, transcending by far the mind and comprehension of man, yea of all creatures, when he so richly pours forth his goodness and out of pure grace and mercy elects, as beneficiaries of that goodness, the poor and wretched and unworthy, who are concluded under sin - that is, those who acknowledge themselves before God to be guilty and deserving of everlasting wrath and perdition; when he does all this that they might know him in his real divine essence, and the sentiment of his heart - that through his Son he will give all who believe everlasting life. And, again, that they might know how he will reject and condemn the others - those who, in pride and security, boast of their own gifts and the fact that they are called the people of God in preference to all other nations; who boast that they have special promises, that they have the prophets, the fathers, etc.; who think that God will acknowledge no nation on earth but themselves as his people and his Church. He will reject them on account of their unbelief, in which they are fettered by the pride and imaginations of their own wisdom and holiness.

23. This is that rich, inexpressible, divine wisdom and knowledge which they possess who believe in Christ, and by which they are enabled to look into the depths and see what the purposes and thoughts of the divine heart are. True, in their weakness they cannot fully reach it; they only can apprehend it in the revealed Word, by faith, as in a glass or image, as Saint Paul says. 1 Cor 13, 12. But to blind, unbelieving reason, divine wisdom will be foreign and hidden; nothing of it will enter reason's consciousness and thoughts, nor will reason desire more though a revelation be given.

24. That attitude Saint Paul encountered, especially when the arrogant Jews opposed themselves so sternly and stubbornly to the preaching of the Gospel. Filled with astonishment, he exclaimed: What shall I say more? I see indeed that it is but the deep unsearchable wisdom of God, his incomprehensible judgment, his inscrutable ways. So he says elsewhere: *"But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the rulers of this world hath known."* I Cor 2, 7-8.

25. This depth and richness of wisdom and knowledge, we Christians apprehend through faith; for, as Saint Paul says, it cannot be apprehended nor comprehended otherwise. Though the world will not do it, we will firmly believe that God is a true God and Lord, wise, just and gracious, whose riches and depth are ineffable. We will glorify him with our whole heart, therefore, as he ought justly to be praised and glorified by every creature, for his wonderful government of his Church, through his Word and revelation. Whosoever will hear and receive the same shall have light that will turn them to him and give them a knowledge of their salvation - an experience which others can never realize. And he is to be glorified because he manifests such unutterable goodness to all who are in sin and under God's wrath that he translates them, though they are unworthy and condemned, from the power of death and hell into the kingdom of eternal grace and life, if they will only seek grace and believe on Christ his Son. And, on the other hand, he is to be glorified because, as a just judge, he rightfully rejects and condemns those who will not believe the revelation and testimony of his will in his Son; who insist on, and boast of, their blind fancies, of their own wisdom and righteousness. Being accordingly deprived of such light, such grace and consolation, they must forever be separated and cast forth from the kingdom of God, regardless of what great name and fame may have been theirs when they were supposed to be the people and Church of God.

26. And such are God's unsearchable judgments and his ways past tracing out. Such are his government and works. For by "judgments" is meant that which in his view is right or wrong; what pleases or does not please him; what merits his praise or his censure; in short, what we should follow or avoid. Again, by "his ways" is meant that which he will manifest unto men and how he will deal with them. These things men cannot and would not discover by their own reason, nor search out by their own intellect, and never should they oppose their judgments or speculations to God. It is not for them to say what is right or wrong, whether an act or ruling is divine. They should humble themselves before him and acknowledge that they cannot understand, they cannot teach God in such matters; they should give him, as their God and Creator, the honor of better understanding himself and his purposes than do we poor, miserable worms.

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?"

27. Paul states three propositions which take away from the world all its boasting concerning divine things: To know the mind of the Lord - what are his thoughts and purposes, or what he has determined within himself from eternity; to be his counselor -

advising or showing him what to do and how to do it; to give to him - assisting him, by one's own ability, to accomplish his divine purpose. All this is impossible to human nature; it cannot know his mind, and how much less will it be able, with all of its wisdom and activity, to counsel him or give him anything.

28. Therefore, it is a shameful presumption on the part of the world to presume by its own powers to ascertain and discover God's essence, his will and works, and to counsel him as to his duties and pleasures; and shameful is it that it presumes with its works to have merited something from him, and to have earned a recompense; shameful presumption to expect to be honored as having achieved much for God's kingdom and for the Church - strengthening and preserving them and filling heaven with holiness!

29. God must defeat minds so perverted. In his administration he must disregard their opinions and attempts. Thus, being made fools by their own wisdom, they may stumble and be offended at it. So would God, by showing us the realities, convince us of the futility of our own endeavors and lead us to acknowledge that we have not fathomed his mind, his counsel and will, and that we cannot counsel him. No man or angel has ever yet first thought out for God his counsel, or offered suggestion to him. Much less is he compelled to call us into counsel, or recompense us for anything we have given to him.

THREE CLASSES OF PEOPLE.

30. There are three different kinds of people on earth, among whom Christians must live. The first of these are that rude class which is unconcerned about the nature of God and how he rules. They have no regard for God's Word. Their faith is only in their mammon and their own appetites. They think only of how they may live unto themselves, like swine in the sty. To such we need not preach anything of this text: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God." They would understand nothing of it though we were to preach it to them everlastingly. They would rather hear of the husks and swill with which they fill themselves. Therefore we will let them remain the swine that they are, and separated from others as they are. But it is exasperating to have to encounter them among Christians.

31. The second class are they who are still reasonable, concerning themselves, about God's purposes and their fulfilment, and how we may be saved. The heathen, and even we ourselves when under the papacy, contended, according to reason, over these things. Here is the beginning of all idolatry on earth; everyone teaches of God according to his own opinion. Mohammed says: He that believes his Koran and its doctrines is pleasing to God. A monk: He that is faithful to the order and its regulations will be saved. The Pope: He who observes his prescriptions and ritual, who makes a pilgrimage to the apostles at Rome, buys himself an indulgence; he has acquired the forgiveness of sins: but he who neglects it is under the wrath of God. These observances they call judgments and ways, controlling consciences and directing them to eternal life; and they imagine that they are God's judgments and ways.

32. On the contrary, the Word declares that God wants none of these things; that they are error and darkness and a vain service - idolatry, which he hates and which provokes him to the utmost. All must acknowledge who have practiced their own self-appointed observances for any length of time, that they have no real assurance that God will be gracious unto them and take pleasure in them because of their lives and observances. Yet, in their blind delusion and presumption, they go on in their vagaries till God touches their hearts by a revelation of his law; then, alarmed, they must admit that they have lived without a knowledge of God and of his will, and that they have no counsel or help unless they lay hold on the words of the Gospel of Christ.

33. We were all like that heretofore. Even I, a learned doctor of divinity, did not know better. I imagined that with my monk's cowl I was pleasing to God and on the way to heaven. I thought that I knew the mind of God well. I wanted to be his counselor, and to earn a recompense of him. But now I realize that my belief was false; it was blindness. I know that I must learn from his Word; that nothing else avails before him but faith in the crucified Christ, his Son; and that in such faith we must live, and do as our respective callings or positions require. Thus we may know right and wrong in God's sight; for our knowledge is not of our own invention, but we have it from revelation. By revelation God shows us his mind; as Saint Paul says (I Cor 2, 16): "*We have the mind of Christ.*" And again (verse 10): "*But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit.*"

34. The third class are those who transgress, having knowledge. They have the Word of revelation. I am not now speaking of those who knowingly persecute the truth - those of the first class, who are unconcerned about God - but I am speaking of those who recognize the revelation but are led by the devil to override it and go around it. They would conceive ways and judgments of God that he has not revealed. If they were Christians, they would be satisfied and thank God for having given us his Word, in which he shows us what is pleasing to him and how we may be saved. But instead, they allow themselves to be led by the devil to seek for other revelations and to speculate on what God in his invisible majesty is, and how he secretly governs the world, and what he has determined in regard to the future of each particular individual. And so presumptuous is our human nature that it would even interfere, with its wisdom, in God's judgment, and intrude into his most secret counsel, attempting to teach him and direct him. It was because of his arrogance that the devil was cast out into the abyss of hell; because he aspired to interference in the affairs of divine majesty, and would drag down man in the fall with himself. So did he cause man to fall in paradise, and so did he tempt the saints; and so he tempted Christ himself when he set him on the pinnacle of the temple.

35. Against this third class Saint Paul directs his words, in answer to the impudent questions of wise reason as to why God punished and rejected the Jews, as he did, and allowed the condemned heathen to come into the Gospel grace; why he so administers justice as to exalt the godless and allow the godly to suffer and be oppressed; why he elected Judas as an apostle and afterwards rejected him and accepted a murderer and

malefactor. With these words Saint Paul would command the wise to cease their impertinent strivings after the things of the secret majesty, and to confine themselves to the revelation he has given us; for all such searching and prying will be in vain and harmful. Though you were to search forever you would nowhere attain the secrets of God's purposes, but would only risk your soul.

36. If you, therefore, would proceed wisely, you cannot do better than to be interested in the Word and in God's works. In them he has revealed himself, and in them he may be comprehended. For instance, he manifests his Son, Christ, to you, on the cross. This is the work of your redemption. In it you may truly apprehend God, and learn that he will not condemn you on account of your sins, if you believe, but will give you everlasting life. So Christ tells you: *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."* Jn 3, 16. In this Christ, says Saint Paul (Col 2, 3), are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden. Herein you will have more than enough to learn, to study and ponder. You will marvel at the wonderful revelation of God, and you will learn to delight in and love him. It is a mine which can never be exhausted in this life by study, and in the contemplation of which, as Peter says (I Pet 1, 12), even the angels never tire, but find unceasing joy and pleasure.

37. I say this so that we may be prepared to instruct and direct those we may meet who, assailed and tormented by such thoughts of the devil, are led to tempt God. They are beguiled by the devil to search and grope, in his false ways, after what may be the intention of God concerning them, and thereby they are led into such apprehension and despair that they are unable to endure it. Such individuals must be reminded of these words, and be reprov'd by them. So did Paul reprove the Jews and cavilers of his day when they presumed to comprehend God with their wisdom, to instruct him as his counselors and masters, to deal with him directly themselves, without any mediator, and to render him such service that he would owe them a recompense. Nothing will come of such searching. Against its endeavors he has erected barriers that, with all your striving, you will never be able to overcome. And so infinite are his wisdom, his counsel and riches, that you will never be able to fathom nor exhaust them. You ought to rejoice that he gives you some knowledge of his omnipotence in his revelation, as follows: *"For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever."*

38. Why should we boast, he would say here, when everything that has being - and our own wisdom and capabilities, of course - did not originate itself but had its origin in him and must be preserved by him, must exist through him? He says (Acts 17, 28): "For in him we live, and move, and have our being." And again (Ps 100, 3): "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." That is, what we are and are able to do, and the fact that we live and have peace and protection - in short, all the good or evil that happens to us - comes to pass not by accident or chance. It all proceeds from his divine counsel and good pleasure. He cares for us as his people and flock. He governs us and gives us good things.

He aids and preserves us in every time of need. Therefore, all honor and glory are due to him alone, from his creatures.

EVERYTHING IS OF GOD.

39. But when he says, Of him, through him, in him, are all things - he says in the simplest way that the beginning, middle and end is of God; that all creatures have their origin in him, also their growth and their limitations. To illustrate: Every little grain of corn has its beginning. A root springs from the dead seed in the ground; then a shoot comes forth and becomes a stalk, a leaflet, an ear of corn, and here it pauses, having the three parts it is intended to have. All creatures also have their beginning, their continuation and end, filling up the period of their existence. When this order ceases, every creature will cease to exist. That which has a beginning and grows but does not attain its end, does not reach perfection, is nothing. To sum it all up, everything must be of God. Nothing can exist without origin in him. Nothing that has come into being can continue to exist without him. He has not created the world as a carpenter builds a house and, departing, leaves it to stand as it may. God remains with and preserves all things which he has made; otherwise they would not continue to exist.

40. Saint Paul does not simply say - as he does elsewhere - Of him are all things. He adds two other assertions, making a triple expression, and then unites the three thoughts into one whole when he says, "To him be the glory for ever." No doubt it was his intention therewith to convey the thought of this article of faith and to distinguish the three persons of the Godhead, even though he does not mention them by name, which is not necessary here. The ancient teachers also looked upon this passage as a testimony to the Holy Trinity. Their analysis was: All things are created by God the Father through the Son - even as he does all things through the Son - and are preserved, in God's good pleasure, through the Holy Spirit. So Paul is wont to say elsewhere; for example (I Cor 8, 6): "There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things." *And concerning the Holy Spirit, Genesis 1, 31 says: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."*

41. The Scriptures teach us that all creation is the work of one God, or the whole Godhead; and yet, inasmuch as they make a distinction between the three persons of the one Godhead, we may properly say that everything, had its origin, everything exists and continues, in the Father as the first person; through the Son, who is of the Father; and in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from both the Father and the Son; which three, nevertheless, are comprehended in the one undivided essence.

42. But how such a distinction of persons exists in the divine essence from eternity is a mystery which we shall and must leave unsolved. For we cannot, with our crude understanding, even fathom God's creatures; no creature is wise enough to understand

these three parts of itself - the beginning, the middle and the end. Though they are distinct from each other, nevertheless they are so closely connected that we cannot with our physical senses separate one from the other. Who has ever been able to discover or explain the process by which a leaflet grows from a tree, or a tiny grain of corn becomes a root, or a cherry grows from the blossom to wood and kernel? Again, who can explain how the bodily members of a human being manifestly grow; what the sight of the eye is; how the tongue can make such a variety of sounds and words, which enter, with marvelous diversity, into so many ears and hearts? Much less are we able to analyze the inner workings of the mind - its thoughts, its meditations, its memory. Why, then, should we presume, with our reason, to compass and comprehend the eternal, invisible essence of God?



First Page

TRINITY SUNDAY - SECOND SERMON.



ROMANS 11:33-36.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

1. This festival requires us to instruct the people in the dogma of the Holy Trinity, and to strengthen both memory and faith concerning it. This is the reason why we take up the subject once more. Without proper instruction and a sound foundation in this regard, other dogmas cannot be rightly and successfully treated. The other festivals of the year present the Lord God clothed in his works and miracles. For instance: on Christmas we celebrate his incarnation; on Easter his resurrection from the dead; on Whit-sunday the gift of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Christian Church. Thus all the other festivals present the Lord in the guise of a worker of one thing or another. But this Trinity Festival discloses him to us as he is in himself. Here we see him apart from whatever guise assumed, from whatever work done, solely in his divine essence. We must go beyond and above all reason, leaving behind the evidence of created things, and hear only God's own testimony concerning himself and his inner essence; otherwise we shall remain unenlightened.

2. Upon this subject the foolishness of God and the wisdom of the world conflict. God's declaration that he is one God in three distinct persons, the world looks upon as wholly unreasonable and foolish; and the followers of mere reason, when they hear it, regard every one that teaches or believes it as no more than a fool. Therefore this article has been assailed continually, from the times of the apostles and the fathers down to the present day, as history testifies. Especially the Gospel of St. John has been subjected to attack, which was written for the special purpose of fortifying this dogma against the attacks of Cerinthus the heretic, who in the apostolic age already attempted to prove from Moses the existence of but one God, which he assigned as reason that our Lord Jesus cannot be true God on account of the impossibility of God and man being united in one being. Thus he gave us the prattle of his reason, which he made the sole standard for heaven to conform to.

3. O shameless reason! How can we poor, miserable mortals grasp this mystery of the Trinity? we who do not understand the operation of our own physical powers—speech, laughter, sleep, things whereof we have daily experience? Yet we would, untaught by the Word of God, guided merely by our fallible head, pronounce upon the very nature of God. Is it not supreme blindness for man, when he is unable to explain the most insignificant physical operation daily witnessed in his own body, to presume to

understand something above and beyond the power of reason to comprehend, something whereof only God can speak, and to rashly affirm that Christ is not God ?

4. Indeed, if reason were the standard of judgment in such matters, I also might make a successful venture; but when the conclusions of even long and mature reflections upon the subject are compared with Scripture, they will not stand. Therefore we must repeat, even though a mere stammering should be the result, what the Scriptures say to us, namely: that Jesus Christ is true God and that the Holy Spirit is likewise true God, yet there are not three Gods; not three divine natures, as we may speak of three brothers, three angels, three suns, three windows. There is one indivisible divine essence, while we recognize a distinction as to the persons.

SCRIPTURE PROOF THAT CHRIST IS GOD.

Paul, speaking of Christ in Hebrews 1:3, refers to him as the express image of God's substance. Again, in Colossians 1:15 he says of Christ: "*Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*" We must take these words for what they say—that all creatures, even angels and men, are ranked below Christ. This classification leaves room for God only: taking away the creature, only God remains. It is one and the same thing, then, to say that Christ is the firstborn of all creatures and that Christ is true and essential God.

5. To make the matter as clear as possible Paul uses the expression "image of the invisible God." If Christ be the image of God he must be a person distinct from him whose image he is, but at the same time in one divine essence with the Father. He and the Father are not one person, but two, and yet Christ could not be the express image of the Father's person, or essence, if he were not equally divine. No creature can be an image of the divine essence, for it does not possess that essence. To repeat, Christ could not be called the express image of God if he and the Father were not distinct persons; there must be one imaged and one who is the image. Expressed more clearly and according to Scripture, one person is the Father, who in eternity begets the other; the other is the Son, begotten in eternity, yet both are equally eternal, mighty, wise and just.

6. Though the Jews and Turks ridicule our doctrine, as if we taught the existence of three brothers in heaven, it does not signify. Might I also cavil were it to serve any purpose here. But they do us wrong and falsify our teaching; for we do not conceive of the Trinity as in the nature of three men or of three angels. We regard it as one divine essence, an intimacy surpassing any earthly unity. The human body and soul are not so completely one as the Triune God. Further, we claim the Holy Scriptures teach that in the one divine essence, God the Father begot a son. Before any creature was made, before the world was created, as Paul says, "before the foundation of the world," in eternity, the Father begot a Son who is equal with him and in all respects God like himself. Not otherwise could Paul call Christ the express image of the invisible God. Thus it is proven that the Father and

the Son are distinct persons, and that nevertheless but one God exists, a conclusion we cannot escape unless we would contradict Paul, and would become Jews and Turks.

PAUL AND MOSES AGREE IN TESTIMONY

7. Again, Paul makes mention of Christ in different phrase, saying: “Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.” 1 Corinthians 10:9. Now, keeping this verse in mind, note how Paul and Moses kiss each other, how clearly the one responds to the other. For Moses says (Numbers 14:22): “All those men... have tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice,” and in this connection the speaker is represented by the term “Lord,” everywhere in the Bible printed by us in capitals to indicate a name belonging only to the Eternal, applicable to none but the one true God. Other terms used to designate God are sometimes applied also to men, but this word “Lord” refers only to God. Now, Moses says: “And the Lord [Adonai, the true God] said... All these men... have tempted me these ten times.” Then comes Paul explaining who this God is—saying they tempted “*Christ.*” Crawl through this statement if you may; the fact remains that Paul declares it was Christ who was tempted, and Moses makes him the one eternal and true God. Moreover, Christ was not at that time born; no, nor were Mary and David. Nevertheless, the apostle plainly says, They tempted Christ, let us not also tempt him.

8. Certainly enough, then, Christ is the man to whom Moses refers as God. Thus the testimony of Moses long before is identical with that of Paul. Though employing different terms, they both confess Christ as the Son of God, born in eternity of the Father, in the same divine essence and yet distinct from him. You may call this difference what you will; we indicate it by the term “person.” True, we do not make a wholly clear explanation of the mystery; we but stammer when speaking of a “Trinity? But what are we to do? we cannot better the attempt. So, then, the Father is not the Son, but the Son is born of the Father in eternity; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and God the Son. Thus there are three persons, and yet but one God. For what Moses declares concerning God Paul says is spoken of Christ.

9. The same argument substantially Paul employs in Acts 20:28, when, blessing the Church of Miletus and exhorting the assembled ministers concerning their office, he says: “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood.” This, too, is a significant text, proving beyond all controversy that Christ our Lord, who purchased the Church with his blood, is truly God, and to him the Church belongs. For the apostle plainly asserts it was God who bought the Church with his blood and that the Church is his own. Now, in view of the fact already established that the persons are distinct, and of the further statement that God has purchased the Church through his own blood, we inevitably conclude that Christ our Savior is true God, born of the Father in eternity, and that he also became man and was born of the Virgin Mary in time.

10. If such blood—the material, tangible, crimson blood, shed by a real man—is truly to be called the blood of God, then he who shed it must be actually God, an eternal, almighty person in the one divine essence. In that case we truly can say the blood flowing from the side of the crucified One and spilled upon the ground is not merely the blood of an ordinary man, but God’s own. Paul does not indulge in frivolous talk. He speaks of a most momentous matter; and he is in dead earnest when he in his exhortation reminds us that it is an exalted office to rule the Church and to feed it with the Word of God. Lest we toy in the performance of such an office we are reminded that the flock is as dear to him as the blood of his dear Son, so precious that all creatures combined can furnish no equivalent. And if we are indolent or unfaithful, we sin against the blood of God and become guilty of it, inasmuch as through our fault it has been shed in vain for the souls which we should oversee.

11. There are many passages of similar import, particularly in the Gospel of John. So we cannot evade the truth but must say God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are three individual persons, yet of one divine essence. We do not, as the Jews and Turks derisively allege, worship three Gods; we worship only one God, represented to us in the Scriptures as three persons. Christ said to Philip (John 14:9), “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” There Christ claims unity and equality with the Father in the one divine essence. So does Paul in Colossians 1:15, where he calls Christ “the image of the invisible God,” at the same time indicating two distinct persons: the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father, yet they are one God. Such passages, I say, are frequent. By means of them the sainted fathers valiantly maintained this dogma of the Trinity against the devil and the world, thus making it our heritage.

12. Now, what care we that reason should regard it as foolishness? It requires no skill to cavil over these things; I could do that as well as others. But, praise God, I have the grace to desire no controversy on this point. When I know it is the Word of God that declares the Trinity, that God has said so, I do not inquire how it can be true; I am content with the simple Word of God, let it harmonize with reason as it may. And every Christian should adopt the same course with respect to all the articles of our faith. Let there be no caviling and contention on the score of possibility; be satisfied with the inquiry: Is it the Word of God? If a thing be his Word, if he has spoken it, you may confidently rely upon it he will not lie nor deceive you, though you may not understand the how and the when. Since, then, this article of the Holy Trinity is certified by the Word of God, and the sainted fathers have from the inception of the Church chivalrously defended and maintained the article against every sect, we are not to dispute as to how God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God. This is an incomprehensible mystery, it is enough that God in his Word gives such testimony of himself. Both his nature and its revelation to us are far beyond our understanding.

PHYSICAL LIFE INEXPLICABLE TO REASON.

13. And why should you presume to comprehend, to exactly understand, the sublime, inconceivable divine essence when you are wholly ignorant of your own body and life? You cannot explain the action of your laughter, nor how your eyes give you knowledge of a castle or mountain ten miles away. You cannot tell how in sleep one, dead to the external world, is yet alive. If we are unable to understand the least detail of our physical selves, anything so insignificant as the growth of a mere hair, for instance, can we, unaided by the revelation of God's Word, climb by reason—that reason so blind to things within its natural realm—into the realm of heavenly mysteries and comprehend and define God in his majesty? If you employ reason from mere love of disputation, why not devote it to questions concerning the daily workings of your physical nature? for instance, where are the five senses during sleep? just how is the sound of your own laughter produced? We might without sin occupy ourselves with such questions. But as to the absolute truth in a matter such as this, let us abide patiently by the authority of the Word. The Word says that Christ is the express image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creatures; in other words, he is God equally with the Father.

14. Again, John 5:23 testifies that all should honor the Son as they honor the Father. And in John 12:44 we read: "*He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.*" Also, John 14:1: "*Believe in God, believe also in me.*" And again, John 16:15: "All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine." These and similar passages are armor that cannot be pierced; for they are uttered by God, who does not lie and who alone is qualified to speak the truth concerning himself. Thus the dogma of the Trinity is thoroughly founded upon the holy Scriptures.

THE THIRD PERSON OF THE TRINITY.

15. Now, having established the existence of Christ in the Trinity, we must next consider the third person, the Holy Spirit, in Scripture sometimes termed the "Spirit" of God and sometimes his "Soul." This person is not spoken of as "born"; he is not born like the Son, but proceeds from the Father and the Son. To express it differently, he is a person possessing in eternity the divine essence, which he derives from the Father and Son in unity in the same way the Son derives it from the Father alone. There are, then, three distinct persons in one divine essence, one divine majesty. According to the Scripture explanation of the mystery, Christ the Lord is the Son of God from eternity, the express image of the Father, and equally great, mighty, wise and just. All deity, wisdom, power and might inherent in the Father is also in Christ, and likewise in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from Father and Son. Now, when you are asked to explain the Trinity, reply that it is an incomprehensible mystery, beyond the understanding of angels and creatures, the knowledge of which is confined to the revelations of Scripture.

16. Rightly did the fathers compose the Creed, or Symbol, in the simple form repeated by Christian children: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son... I believe in the Holy Ghost." This confession we did not devise, nor did the fathers of former times. As the bee collects honey from many fair

and gay flowers, so is this Creed collected, in appropriate brevity, from the books of the beloved prophets and apostles—from the entire holy Scriptures—for children and for unlearned Christians. It is fittingly called the “Apostle’s Symbol,” or “Apostle’s Creed.” For brevity and clearness it could not have been better arranged, and it has remained in the Church from ancient time. It must either have been composed by the apostles themselves or it was collected from their writings and sermons by their ablest disciples.

17. It begins “I believe.” In whom? “In God the Father.” This is the first person in the Godhead. For the sake of clear distinction, the peculiar attribute and office in which each person manifests himself is briefly expressed. With the first it is the work of creation. True, creation is not the work of one individual person, but of the one divine, eternal essence as such. We must say, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit created heaven and earth. Yet that work is more especially predicated of the person of the Father, the first person, for the reason that creation is the only work of the Father in which he has stepped forth out of concealment into observation; it is the first work wrought by the divine Majesty upon the creature. By the word “Father” he is particularly and rightly distinguished from the other persons of the Trinity. It indicates him as the first person, derived from no other, the Son and the Holy Spirit having existence from him.

18. Continuing, the Creed says, I believe in another who is also God. For to believe is something we owe to no being but God alone. Who is this second person? Jesus Christ. God’s only begotten Son. Christians have so confessed for more than fifteen hundred years; indeed, such has been the confession of believers from the beginning of the world. Though not employing precisely these words, yet this has been their faith and profession.

19. The first designation of God the Son makes him the only Son of God. Although angels are called sons of the Lord our God, and even Christians are termed his children, yet no one of these is said to be the “only” or “only-begotten” Son. Such is the effect of Christ’s birth from the Father that he is unequalled by any creature, not excepting even the angels. For he is in truth and by nature the Son of God the Father; that is, he is of the same divine, eternal, uncreated essence.

20. Next comes the enumeration of the acts peculiar to him: “Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” The distinct personality of the Son is thus demonstrated by acts peculiar to himself. Not the Father and not the Holy Spirit, but the Son alone, assumed human nature of flesh and blood, like unto ours, to suffer, die, rise again and ascend into heaven.

21. In the third place we confess, “*I believe in the Holy Ghost.*” Here again a distinct person is named, yet one in divine essence with the Father and the Son; for we must believe in no one but the true God, in obedience to the first commandment: “I am

Jehovah thy God... Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Thus briefly this confession comprehends the unity of the divine essence— we accept and worship only one God—and the revealed truth that in the Trinity are three distinct persons. The same distinction is indicated in holy baptism; we are baptized into the faith of one God, yet Christ commands us to baptize “*into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”

22. The peculiarity of this third person is the fact that he proceeds from both the Father and the Son. He is therefore called also the Spirit of the Father and the Son; he is poured into the human heart and reveals himself in the gathering of the Church of Christ in all tongues. Through the Word of the Gospel he enlightens and kindles the hearts of men unto one faith, sanctifying, quickening and saving them.

23. So the Creed confesses three persons as comprehended in one divine essence, each one, however, retaining his distinct personality; and in order that the simple Christian may recognize that there is but one divine essence and one God, who is tri-personal, a special work, peculiar to himself, is ascribed to each person. And such acts, peculiar to each person, are mentioned for the reason that thus a confusion of persons is avoided. To the Father we ascribe the work of creation; to the Son the work of Redemption; to the Holy Spirit the power to forgive sins, to gladden, to strengthen, to transport from death to life eternal. The thought is not that the Father alone is the Creator, the Son alone Redeemer and the Holy Spirit alone Sanctifier. The creation and preservation of the universe, atonement for sin and its forgiveness, resurrection from the dead and the gift of eternal life—all these are operations of the one Divine Majesty as such. Yet the Father is especially emphasized in the work of creation, which proceeds originally from him as the first person; the Son is emphasized in the redemption he has accomplished in his own person; and the Holy Spirit in the peculiar work of sanctification, which is both his mission and revelation. Such distinction is made for the purpose of affording Christians the unqualified assurance that there is but one God and yet three persons in the one divine essence— truths the sainted fathers have faithfully gathered from the writings of Moses, the prophets and the apostles, and which they have maintained against all heretics.

24. This faith has descended to us by inheritance, and by his power God has maintained it in his Church, against sects and adversaries, unto the present time. So we must abide by it in its simplicity and not be wise. Christians are under the necessity of believing things apparently foolish to reason. As Paul says (1 Corinthians 1:21): “*It was God’s good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe.*” How can reason adapt itself to comprehend that three are one, and one is three; that God became man; that he who is washed with water in obedience to Christ’s command, is washed with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and cleansed from all sins? Such articles of faith appear utterly foolish to reason. Paul aptly calls the Gospel foolish preaching wherewith God saves such as do not depend on their own wisdom but simply believe the Word. They who will follow reason in the things dealt with in these articles, and will reject the Word, shall be defeated and destroyed in their wisdom.

25. Now, we have in the holy Scriptures and in the Creed sufficient information concerning the Holy Trinity, and all that is necessary for the instruction of ordinary Christians. Besides, the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and that of the Holy Spirit is also attested by miracles not to be lightly esteemed nor disregarded. The Lord our God brings to pass miraculous things for the Christian's sake—for the strengthening of his faith—and not merely as a rebuke to false teachers. Were he to consider the false teachers alone, he might easily defer their retribution to the future life, since he permits many other transgressors to go unpunished for ten, twenty or thirty years. But the fact is, God openly in this life lays hold upon leaders of sects who blaspheme and slander him with their false doctrines. He inflicts upon them unusual punishments for the sake of warning others. Besides being openly convicted of blasphemy and having the condemnation of their own conscience, the misguided ones receive testimony to the fact that these false leaders are instigators of blasphemy against God's name and his Word. All men are compelled to admit God can have no pleasure in their doctrine, since he visits them with special marks of his displeasure, destroying them with severer punishments than ordinarily befall offenders.

26. History records that John the evangelist had as contemporary a heretic, by the name of Cerinthus, who was the first to arise in opposition to the apostolic doctrine and in blasphemy against the Lord Jesus with the claim that Jesus is not God. This blasphemy spread to such an extent that John saw himself compelled to supplement the work of the other evangelists with his Gospel, whose distinct purpose it is to defend and maintain the deity of Christ against Cerinthus and his rabble. A feature of John's Gospel patent to all is the sublime beginning of his Gospel which renders it distinct from the others. He does not lay stress upon the miraculous doings of Christ, but upon his preaching, wherein he reveals himself powerfully as true God, born of the Father from eternity, and his equal in power, honor, wisdom, righteousness and every other divine work. With respect to John and Cerinthus it is reported that the former, having gone to a public bath with some of his disciples, became aware that Cerinthus and his rabble were there, also. Without hesitation he told his disciples to be up and away, and not to abide among blasphemers. The disciples followed his advice and departed. Immediately after their departure the room collapsed, and Cerinthus with his followers perished, not one escaping.

27. We also read concerning the heretic Arius, the chief foe of his time toward the dogma of the deity of Christ. the injury done by this man to the cause of Christ was such as to occupy the Church for four centuries after his death; and still today his heresy has not been altogether rooted out. But the Lord took the matter in hand by the performance of a miracle which could not but be understood. History records that Arius had ingratiated himself into the favor of Constantine, the emperor, and his counselors. With an oath he had succeeded in impressing them with the righteousness of his doctrine, so that the emperor gave command that Alexander, bishop of Constantinople, should recognize him as a member of the Christian Church and restore him to the priestly office. When the godly bishop refused to accede to this demand, knowing full well the purpose pursued by

Arius and his followers, Eusebius and the other bishops who supported Arius threatened him with the imperial edict and expressed the determination to drive him out by force and to have Arius restored by the congregation as such. However, they gave him a day to think the matter over.

28. The godly bishop was fearful. The following of Arius was large and powerful, being supported by the imperial edict and the whole court. The bishop, therefore, resolved to seek help from God, where alone it is found in all things relating to God's honor. He fell down upon his face in the church and prayed all night long that God should preserve his name and honor by methods calculated to stem the tide of evil purpose, and to preserve Christendom; against the heretics. When it was morning, and the hour had come when Alexander the bishop should either restore Arius to office or be cast out of his own, Arius convened punctually with his followers. As the procession was wending its way to the church, Arius suddenly felt ill and was compelled to seek privacy. The pompous procession halted, waiting his return, when the message came that his lungs and liver had passed from him, causing his death. The narrative comments: *Mortem dignam blasphema et foetida mente*—a death worthy such a blasphemous and turpid mind.

29. We see, then, that this dogma has been preserved by God first through the writings and the conflicts of the apostles, and then by miracles, against the devil and his blasphemers. And it shall be preserved in the future likewise, so that, without a trace of doubt, we may believe in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. This is the faith which we confess with our children daily. To guard against a mixing of persons or the abandonment of the tri-personality, three distinct acts are predicated. This should enable the common Christian to avoid confusing the persons, while maintaining the divine unity as to essence. We proclaim these things on this Sunday in order to call attention to the fact that we have not come upon this doctrine in a dream, but by the grace of God through his Word and the holy apostles and Fathers. God help us to be found constant and without blemish in this doctrine and faith to our end. Amen.

[Content Page](#)



First Page