

Trinity Sunday, Year B, 2009  
The Rev. Ronald N. Johnson

Today is Trinity Sunday, always the First Sunday after the Feast of Pentecost. It is the Sunday on which the Church celebrates the Triune nature of Almighty God. Trinity Sunday comes on the Sunday after Pentecost, because with Pentecost and the revelation of God as Holy Spirit, the manifestation of God to His creation is complete. We know God as Father. We know God as Son. We know God as Holy Spirit. We acknowledge God as one God because we are a monotheistic religion. But, we say that this one God has three persons and that we know God only in these persons.

Confusing? You had better believe it. But, this is the historic faith, the doctrine and dogma of all truly orthodox Christian bodies, *and this is important*, not a single one of us understand it. It is a mystery. So, if you are among those who are confused by the doctrine of the Trinity, you are in very good company. But, the Church clings to this doctrine because Christians have always experienced God in the three persons of the Trinity. We know God as “Father,” the Creator and God of the entire universe, who loves us so much that he wants us to experience him as Father, as *Abba* in the Aramaic language of Jesus. *Abba* translates as “daddy.” If you think about that, it is a powerful thing. Jesus taught that God the Father wants to be our spiritual “daddy.” That is about as assuring and comforting as any relationship with the holy can ever be.

We also know God as “Son.” Without understanding the mystery, because mysteries, by definition defy understanding, we believe that God took on human flesh and, in Jesus, became one of us. In the creeds, we say that he came down from heaven. He entered created time and space and became one of us, subject, Scripture says, to temptation just as we are, but he did not sin. He took our sins upon himself, and offered them to God in the sacrifice of his life for us. Through him, we have salvation. We believe, because Scripture states it, and because of the consistent teaching of the Church from the earliest times, that Jesus is our spiritual brother. Through him, through his sacrifice for us, we are part of God’s own family and we are brothers and sisters in spirit with all who are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord.

When we feel the power of God in this world, when we find our hearts burning for Jesus, when longed-for, prayed-for miracles happen, when we sense divine protection or divine power to accomplish those things that accord with God’s purpose, we know God as Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God working with us and in us that allows us to be disciples of Jesus and to do the work of God in this world. With God the Holy Spirit guiding us, empowering us, enabling us and encouraging us, we can do all things appropriate, necessary and good that please God and help to build his Kingdom in this world. Without the Holy Spirit, we can do none of this. The Holy Spirit teaches us, the Holy Spirit leads us, and the Holy Spirit mentors us. The Holy Spirit is the active person of God Almighty in this world. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit that, “taught our hearts to fear,” in the words of John Newton, author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*, and it is the Holy Spirit that brought us the grace to overcome that fear. It is the Holy Spirit that leads us to salvation in Jesus, the Son of God.

Is Trinitarian doctrine confusing doctrine? The answer is “Yes!” But the Church holds to it because we believe it is the only explanation for our experience of God and we believe it is the truth. One thing might be helpful, because it reflects the thinking of the Church Fathers who developed our early theology. In early Greek theater, only men were actors, and each actor would play several parts. To convey the different characters, they would put on face masks, called, in Greek, *personas*. This word gives us the word “person.” The persons of the Trinity are the ways that we experience God; therefore they are the ways that we know God. And, on this Trinity Sunday, we praise God in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen*