

THE HOLY TRINITY

Part of our Gospel for today reads: ¹⁸ *When Jesus came near, He spoke to them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ²⁰ and by teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you! Certainly, I am with you always, until the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

The passage is an altogether remarkable and magnificent one! Jesus clearly identifies Himself as the one God. There is no authority in heaven or on earth that is not in His keeping. Who else can say that but the one, true, and only God? He tells the disciples to teach not what God has commanded, as though He were less than God, but to teach obedience to everything that He has commanded. No one has the right to do that except the one, true, and only God. Additionally, He promises that His presence will abide with them, no matter where they are and no matter how long the world stands. None but the one and only God could make such a promise and be expected to keep it, and yet, when He commands them to baptise, He does not tell them to baptise only in His name or in the name of God, as though God were somehow different from Himself. Baptism is to take place in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But still there is no suggestion that there is more than one God. All three persons are linked inseparably together in the formula for baptism, and yet each person is mentioned as distinct from the other two.

It is in exactly the same way that the Persons are distinguished and yet always together in the rest of the New Testament. Jesus' own incarnation sets the pattern. All three Persons are involved without any hint that there are three gods (Matthew 1:18-24; Luke 1:26-35). We see it again at Jesus' baptism, where all three Persons are evident together and yet distinct (Matthew 3:16-17). We see it in the identification of Jesus with the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1-4, where the Father speaks, the Son is the chosen Servant of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit abides in Him (Matthew 12:18-21).

It is in John's gospel that we see the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit most beautifully spelled out. Always the Persons are distinct and yet always they are one, one in essence, united in will, one in a perfect loving harmony with one another, and one in the burning desire for our salvation. We cannot help but be struck by the beauty of the words that the members of the Trinity speak to and about one another. Read the gospel of John. You can almost see the glow on Jesus' face as He talks about His Father - everything He does, He does out of love for and in obedience to the Father who has sent Him (e.g., John 5:19-38; 8:27-29; 12:23-28, 44-50). No less the Father, when He speaks; He points to the Son as the sole, great object of His delight, to whom all mankind should give heed (e.g., John 12:28; Luke 3:21-22; Mark 9:7). When Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit, it is as though everything was for the glory of the Holy Spirit who comes forth from the Father and the Son (John 16:5-11), and then when the Holy Spirit speaks, who and what does He speak about? The Son! Everything is the Son! He speaks so that we remember and think always about Jesus (John 16:12-15). (Just imagine what life would be like if husbands and wives and friends spoke that way about one another!)

In Acts and in the epistles too we see the same thing. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are spoken of as clearly distinct, not just different names for different activities. Jesus makes a clear distinction between the persons at His ascension in Acts 1:7-8. The Holy Spirit comes as distinct from the Father and the Son at Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4. When St. Peter preached as a result of the activity of the Holy Spirit, what is the subject of his sermon? It is the work of all three persons for our salvation (Acts 2:17-39). The Holy Spirit is specifically called God in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3-4). Typical of St. Paul is his opening address to the Romans in which he speaks of all three persons as distinct (Romans 1:1-7).

And yet with all of these references to the persons as distinct, there is no hint that they are three separate gods. Quite to the contrary, Jesus testifies to the unity of the Godhead in its essence when He declares, *"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30). He tells Philip, *"Have I been with you for such a long time, and have you not known Me, Philip? The person who has seen Me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me? These Words, which I am telling you, I am not speaking on My own authority, but the Father, who remains in Me, is doing His works. ¹¹ Believe Me, that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me. Or else, believe because of the works themselves!"* (John 14:9-11). Therefore, if we ask God who He is, the answer that He gives in His Word is that He is one God, in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Anyone who worships a god other than this one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is worshipping a false god.