

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit who we worship as one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The divine mystery of the Holy Trinity is beyond our own comprehension. And yet, we try our best to understand how God is One in three Persons. We can attempt to picture it. But we can't fully grasp the divine mystery of three in One. We can't get our heads around the essence and relationships involved in the one true God as the Trinity.

But we sure do try. One analogy that's used is water. Water is a liquid. It can be frozen as ice. It can become steam. Three in one: liquid, ice, and steam. As helpful as this analogy seems to be, it ultimately fails. You see, you can't have that water be liquid, ice, and steam at the same time. You either have liquid, ice, or steam. Never all three at the same time. But the Father is always God; never is there a time when He was not God. The Son is always God; never is there a time when He was not God. The Holy Spirit is always God; never is there a time when He was not God. All three Persons of the Trinity are always and fully God at the same time.

Some today think that God the Father was the God of the Old Testament era, God the Son was the God of the New Testament era, and God the Holy Spirit is the God of our era. But the Triune God does not come to us in different modes through history. God is never divided. None is greater or lesser than the other Person. God is eternal as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, when we pray to God the Father, we are also praying to God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Another way the Trinity is falsely taught is through the apple. It's a good idea, but this analogy also fails. Each apple has an outer peel, an inner core, and a meaty center. One apple in three parts. Comparing an apple to the Trinity may be helpful, but it fails in that the peel, core, and center are only parts of the apple. Again, the Father is completely God all the time, not just part of God, not just a third of God. The Son is completely God all the time. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is completely God all the time.

The shamrock, or three-leaf clover, has been used too, but it too fails to fully comprehend the Trinity.

Very simply, the Triune God is so far beyond us that we've just barely scratched the surface of who He is and what He can do. But there is something we do know about the one true God. Jesus reveals to us this truth in the Gospel lesson as He said, ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”*** (Matthew 28:19). There, Jesus reveals the Oneness of God in three Persons. God is three in One. This is the Holy Trinity. This is what we believe, teach, and confess. Even this is far beyond our comprehension.

In our reading from Genesis, God first reveals Himself. ***“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”*** (Genesis 1:1). Here, God is revealed as the Creator. Everything that is, was created by God. In the Creeds, we confess that God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth. Now, this is not to be understood as though the other Persons of the Trinity had nothing to do with the creating of the universe.

Remember, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are also eternal, just as the Father is eternal. Concerning Jesus, the Son of God, St. John writes, ***“All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing that was made”*** (John 1:3). Concerning the Holy Spirit, He is described as ***“hovering over the face of the waters”*** (Genesis 1:2b). The Holy Spirit was active at the creation, preserving what He had created.

You see, the work of creation is what all the Persons of the Trinity share. The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit cannot be divided. There are not three Gods, but one God.

At the creation of the heavens and the earth, the one true God who reveals Himself in three Persons, tells us even a little more about Him. Day after day, He created the universe. He just does it. He thinks about it, speaks it, and it is done. But that sixth day is different.

On the sixth day of creation, God said, ***“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”*** (Genesis 1:26-27).

Much is revealed here. First, the Triune God includes an obvious deliberation and plan. He did nothing similar in the case of the earlier creatures. Without any deliberation and counsel before, He just said, ***“Let the earth sprout vegetation”*** (Genesis 1:11), and ***“Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above”*** (Genesis 1:20). But here, when He wants to create man, God summons Himself to a council and announces some sort of deliberation within the one God.

First thing to note here is that there is an outstanding difference between man and all other creatures. Apes resemble man. They dwell together. They are fed together. They eat together. They receive nourishment from the same foods. They each rest and sleep. Their similarity is great. But there is a great difference. The apes were never created by the special plan and providence of God. Man was. So, man is a creature far superior to the rest of the living beings that live a physical life.

Man is set apart when God says that He made a special deliberation as He gave consideration to the creation of man, and not only that, but also making man in the image of God. God gave man dominion over all other creatures. ***“And behold, it was very good”*** (Genesis 1:31).

But as you all know, the world today isn't what it was originally created to be. Due to Adam's Fall into sin, man has lost the image of God.

In his book “The Trinity”, St. Augustine attempts to classify the image of God. He wrote that the image of God is the power of the human soul: memory, the mind or intellect, and will. Augustine may be right, but due to Adam's Fall, our memory, our intellect, and our will are often forgetful and out of whack. We still have memory, mind, and will, but they are depraved and weakened.

Like the Trinity, in defining the image of God, we keep on coming up short. We can only guess as to what that was like. But like how God calls Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are given clues on the lost image of God.

We know that Adam was of one will with God. We know that Adam was of one will with Eve. There were no secrets. So, both Adam's inner and outer sensations were all of the purest kind. His intellect was clear. His memory was the best. His will was straightforward. In everything, Adam and Eve surpassed all other living creatures. They had eyes sharper than an eagle. They were stronger than lions and bears. They had no fear of death or any other danger. They were content with God's favor.

Due to the Fall into sin, we lost all of that. The created world is no longer completely subordinate to fallen man. Animals attack and kill man. Water drowns man. In the end, due to the Fall into sin, man dies, and the earth covers him.

Even after the Fall, man still retains human personality and powers of intellect, but we lost our one will with God. Instead of knowing God to be the source of every blessing, the source of our daily bread – food, clothing, and shelter – our sinful nature looks inward and praises ourselves and thanks ourselves.

As we begin the month of June, the historical month of marriage, we realize that so much has been lost, since man has lost the image of God due to the Fall. God created man male and female. Before 2015, this was an agreed upon fact. No logical person argued against that. But since the Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court decision in 2015, it has become increasingly difficult for many to define a man from a woman. You know and I know, but this is now an argument by the fallen, sinful world, which is led by the great deceiver, Satan.

I feel sorry for anyone who is struggling with this. We are all confronted with this ideology day in and day out – in our public schools, our public libraries, television shows and movies, and of course, social media.

Imagine you're a teenager and you feel awkward and out of place. You don't fit in with the other boys and other girls. You just want to fit in and be happy. One day, you go on social media. Suddenly you see people happy because they socially transitioned to the other sex. You see that they are applauded by the culture. You think, maybe I should do that.

Let's say you are a parent of a teenager. One day, your teenager comes to you with a different name and wants you to refer to him by a different pronoun. You think, I gave my child his name. You remember the moment you found out what sex your child was before he was born. You read online and find out that if you don't affirm your child's new name, that you are a cruel and oppressive parent. You also read that if you don't affirm your child, your child may commit suicide. What are you supposed to do?

We all struggle. We have all felt awkward. But God makes no mistakes. Just as He deliberated in the creation of Adam. He also deliberated in the creation of every single human being as He formed your inward parts as He knitted you together in your mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-16).

The only thing that is different from the creation of Adam is that we have lost the image of God. In its place, we are all born with a sinful human nature, which is turned away from God and is focused only on the self.

The wages of sin is eternal death apart from God. This could have been the fate for everyone. But it isn't. God wasn't about to leave us to our sinful desires. God wants us all to be with Him. That is why He created humanity after all. Remember, when Adam was created, He said, ***"It was very good"*** (Genesis 1:31). Everything was finished. God rested the seventh day.

All that God had created, Satan has done his best to undo. Marriage is the foundational building block of society, so he convinced sinful man that marriage is akin to a simple friendship. It isn't. Marriage was instituted by God as a union of sexual differences – one man and one woman in a one flesh union – and is intended for mutual companionship, both in prosperity and adversity, and for the procreation of children who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord. Satan convinced Adam and Eve that they could become like God, even though they already possessed the image of God. Satan promised what he could not provide but could only take away. Satan only lies. That is his nature.

In all that Satan destroyed in the Garden, God restored. Jesus took our punishment – the agony of our sins, the sorrows of death, and even the horrors of hell, which is the complete separation from God. While on the cross, Jesus said, ***"It is finished."*** There, God provided for our redemption. Then He rested.

On that Easter morning, Jesus who was dead, rose from the dead. He conquered the sin that leads to the grave. He crushed the powers of hell. Forty days later, He ascended into heaven and to this day, He has all power and all authority on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus suffered, died, rose, and ascended so that man could one day regain the image of God.

Today, God comes to us through His Means of Grace. Here in the Divine Service, God comes to us through His Word and Sacraments. Through these means, the Triune God sanctifies us as we receive forgiveness and strength for our weak faith.

In Holy Baptism, Satan is cast out as God gives the baptized the power to believe in Him. As a baptized child of God, Satan places a target upon you. He never gives up. He wants you to return to him and his lies.

So, God gives us more ammunition against Satan, the fallen world, and our sinful nature. He gives us confession and absolution as a buffer from the evil foes. And He doesn't stop there. He also gives us the Sacrament of the Altar where we receive even more of God's forgiveness as we partake of Christ's body and blood. God gives us a foretaste of the feast to come. God comes to us because He loves you. He desires the salvation of all mankind.

At Christ's coming, He will raise all people. On the cross, salvation was won for all people. But on the Last Day, judgment will occur. Sadly, not everyone wants the free gift of salvation won by Jesus. To those people who refuse God's grace, at Christ's coming, they will have to give an account concerning their deeds. Those who have done evil by priding in themselves instead of receiving God's grace will be cast into eternal fire. But those who trust in Jesus will rise to the newness of life in the New Heaven and New Earth with the restored image of God.

We will never fully grasp the divine mystery of the Trinity. We will never comprehend how majestic and immense the one true God is. But we don't have to fully understand Him, since He understands us. He knows every one of our wants and our fears, and He provides us always with what we need – our daily bread and most of all, the forgiveness of our sins – through His Word and His Sacraments. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**