

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the feast day of the Holy Trinity and I want to begin our discernment today about the Trinity with a phrase from our Declaration of Independence. In this declaration we hear this statement:

We hold these truths to be self-evident...

The truths mentioned in this revered document are truths not needing to be demonstrated or explained; we as a nation just simply hold them to be obvious...rather, self-evident truths such as, all are created equal, all are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Within our liturgical calendar we set aside a day to gather in celebration...to give our thanks and praise in worship and to listen and discern the self-evident essence of our Godhead...God the Creator Father, God the Redeeming Son, and God the Sanctifying Holy Spirit.

This concept of the trinity is challenging...it has been and will forever be debated among scholars and theologians and will never be completely understood or rationalized, just simply self-evident through the teaching within Holy Scripture.

Another self-evident truth is that our dim understanding of all scriptural doctrine is by faith, which comes through the work of the Holy Spirit. But no matter how we discern it, debate it, or reconcile the Trinity, the self-evident truth is that through the three essences of our God, we have the promise of grace and life.

And so, I begin our discernment about the self-evident essence of our Triune God that comes from within our Gospel today. From Matthew we hear that the “eleven” disciples, it doesn’t say “*the* disciples” rather it says clearly, “*the* eleven disciples” that means, Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John, sons of Zebedee, Philip, Nathaniel, Matthew the Levite, Thomas Didymus or the twin, James and Judas, sons of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot...these eleven meet Jesus in Galilee.

At this point in the Gospel, none of these disciples have seen Jesus since chapter 26 when Jesus is arrested, and we hear why the disciples have not seen Jesus. Matthew tells it this way:

⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, ‘Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.’ *Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.* (Matthew 26:55-57)

ALL the disciples, including the very disciples that Jesus is meeting with in our Gospel lesson today deserted him and fled from Jesus. These are the same eleven who have denied Jesus, abandoned Jesus, or just simply disappeared after his arrest and his death. But now they are going to the place that Jesus has instructed them on the testimony of two women who can be considered the first preachers to tell of the Good News of Jesus Christ...they are Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph. These two women have who have encountered Jesus after he is killed.

We then hear that when these eleven disciples meet Jesus and literally see Jesus, they worship him; but some have doubt...some have doubt. Some may say...that's odd...why would they doubt? Would you doubt? I know I would.

Now of course this encounter with Jesus and the eleven is LONG before the mass media we experience in our lives today, but in the doubt of the disciples we see that the powers of propaganda are just as visceral and violently misleading back then as they are today.

The doubt we hear in this passage shows that the Chief Priests and the elders can still promote or publicize their particular political cause or point of view against Jesus even without mass media and in fact, the effects of *their* propaganda are far reaching. Here is how Matthew tells it:

¹² After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, ¹³ telling them, 'You must say, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep." ¹⁴ If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day. (Matt 28:12-15)

The evidence and the information about Jesus at this point is biased, it is certainly misleading, and even a potential comfort for the governor but nonetheless, the eleven disciples gather and Jesus comes to them and we hear this wonderful commissioning from Jesus in our Gospel today:

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

With this commissioning we hear of the Triune God who establishes all authority. We hear of the Son whom disciples continue to this day to gather around and who remains with them and us until perfection is consummated. And we hear of the Holy Spirit who enables us all to be in the company of the Holy Trinity to the end of the age. This commissioning also establishes an essential trait of church...that we are one Holy, catholic, apostolic church.

I want to clear up and establish one essence about this trait that may be misunderstood and that is the term "catholic." I think its safe to say that most of us know the term "catholic" in this phrase from the Apostles' Creed means universal. It is not a reference to the Roman Christian Church. However, I want to point out another perception that is raised with this term as mentioned by my dear friend Pastor Fryer, the pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in New York City. Within his sermon last week on Pentecost Sunday, Pastor Fryer claims and I would fervently agree that:

For any congregation, including our dear congregation, to be "catholic" means that we welcome the world into our community. When we welcome the whole world, we are welcoming some folks that we might not ordinarily associate with. No matter! The church is catholic. It is universal. It longs to save souls — every one of them!¹

¹ Rev. Gregory Fryer, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church New York, New York. In his sermon titled, "The Catholicity of the Church" preached at Immanuel Lutheran Church on Pentecost Sunday, May 28, 2023.

Pastor Fryer's entire sermon for last Sunday stressed that the church's "catholic" nature means that it is to welcome everyone. But there are always those excuses that justifies our feelings and consciences to say...well, they just don't belong here...they're in my seat...there making a mess of the place. Pastor Fryer then referenced his former teacher and mentor, the Rev. Dr. Robert Jenson who emphasized the welcoming nature of the church this way...says Jenson:

If there is someone in the church who I do not welcome, then it is I who do not belong — not that one.²

This "catholic" or welcoming demand on the church may seem a bit frightening and cause us to wonder about our own faith. Maybe it has us thinking about the so-called strength of our own faith? Perhaps we just found ourselves doubting our own faith without any outside influence or propaganda? Possibly we may be thinking...is my faith this welcoming? Perhaps I'm not the "good-Christian" I like to think I am?

Well, here is the Good News that becomes self-evident...the eleven disciples who met with Jesus back then and doubted continue to meet with Jesus to this very day. The meeting with Jesus continues today but the names of the disciples are changed and the meeting is not on a mountain...it is in this very place called St. Paul Lutheran Church...and Jesus is with *us* all...even with US who doubt...but nonetheless, Jesus is present, just as He promised.

The doubt mentioned in this Gospel of Matthew refers to "little faith" showing NOT doubt, rather showing that a great faith is not needed to be in the presence of our Triune God. The eleven disciples that Jesus called to follow are the same who gather here today, the only difference is that we were called by the Holy Spirit...but NONE of us, them nor us, have perfect faith nor a great faith, we all have faith...period...a faith that enables us to believe in the mercy and new life promised to us through the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit who is the God we worship here today. We do not have perfect faith. We have a faith that is NOT based on evidence. We have a faith that is based on testimony along with the self-evident truth revealed to us through the teaching within Holy Scripture and in the promise handed to us in this Holy Meal. Our faith in the Word and Sacraments before us today is from the Holy Spirit that has sealed us as God's own through the waters of our Baptism. The Triune God who has created us, redeemed us, and sanctified us is NOT a God for angels and perfect believers, but is a God who is present with us in this wavering worshipping community. And in this wavering worshipping community we have been entrusted with this blessed commission to GO, to WELCOME and TEACH, and to BAPTIZE in the name of the Triune God.³

This is the same God who has given of His very self to show the love He has for us. In this love revealed to us we see a God of power and might, but that power and might is revealed in the simple, ordinary aspects of our lives. In this Triune God...God the Father our Creator, God the Son our Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit our Sanctifier...is the self-evident revelation of the profound depths of God's heart and the profound depths of God's pure unutterable love for us all...that remains for us and with us all...to the end of the age.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

² Ibid. page 4 of Fryer's sermon titled, "The Catholicity of the Church"

³ Keck, Leander, senior editor. *NIB, The New Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. Volume VIII. General Articles on the New Testament, The Gospels of Matthew and Mark.* Page 503-505.