

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

Today is the day in our liturgical year entitled the feast of the Holy Trinity. Our worship this day celebrates and gives thanks for the Holy Trinity and the threefold love given to us all. Each time we gather, we gather in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...but do we fully know why? Or is this so engrained that we really don't give it much thought? Do we know what this Trinity means for our faith or better yet, for the salvation of our very souls?

We may not know how to articulate our answers to these questions...nonetheless, we believe that God breathes the Holy Spirit upon us, and it is the Holy Spirit that proceeds from God and Jesus Christ that opens our hearts and our minds. Through the Holy Spirit our faith is ignited, enabling us to see God's love for us made manifest in Jesus Christ. And through the faith given us, we believe that through God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit we are freely given grace and life eternal in God's glorious kingdom. And from the appointed Gospel lesson today from John we have our faith in this Holy Trinity revealed to us through the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Today, from the Gospel of John we hear that a man named Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night or because it is John's Gospel, we can say he comes to Jesus in his "unbelief" to inquire into his teaching. And in the exchange with Nicodemus, Jesus speaks of wind, and Spirit that enables Nicodemus and each of us to perceive the special relationship between Jesus and the Father and in this exchange we, like Nicodemus, learn that our faith in this relationship becomes the condition of our salvation. This exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus also reveals that we might not fully know how to believe or how to worship, much less how to live as faithful Christians...we know how others ought to, but do we ourselves know? Fortunately, the basis of our relationship with God is dependent upon God rather than us.

It is God who has breathed the Holy Spirit upon us, and in this, stirs our faith that enables us to see the grace of that relationship as it is manifested in our worship today. While this story reveals how our faith works in our relationship with God, it also shows to us our dependence upon the gift of the Spirit for the renewal of our faith through our worship.

As we listen today to the proclamation from John's Gospel and participate in this Holy Meal may we please always keep in mind that Jesus DOES NOT clarify our human experience, Jesus merely directs us to the Holy Spirit that enables us to believe and to see a relationship that reveals for us, God the Father and the grace given through the Son, Jesus Christ.

From our Gospel lesson today, the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son is first revealed when Nicodemus says to Jesus:

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." (John 3:2b)

Now for someone who comes to Jesus by night, meaning out of unbelief, this comment seems as if Nicodemus has a very firm grasp on the relationship between God and Jesus. But now in this exchange Jesus seems to say to Nicodemus, you said all the correct words but you really don't

have a clue about the relationship. It seems as if Nicodemus could read all the musical notes but couldn't hear or play a lick of music because Jesus then says to him:

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." (John 3:3)

This is Jesus directing Nicodemus and us to the Holy Spirit and the faith it stirs within us. In this response to Nicodemus, Jesus is making very clear that Nicodemus may be able to point out the relationship between the Father and the Son, but he has no faith in it because he has NOT been "born from above." Then Nicodemus reveals his lack of faith or his misunderstanding of faith when he expresses a very literal meaning between the flesh and the Spirit when he asks,

"How can anyone be born after having grown old?" (John 3:4b)

This is where Nicodemus' literal understanding gets in way of recognizing the Holy Spirit and extinguishes his faith and blinds him to how his relationship to the triune God works. His faith is the part of the Holy Spirit that moves within him and draws him and makes him part of that Trinitarian relationship. Jesus then makes this known to Nicodemus when he says:

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:5-8)

In the very beginning the, *ruach* the Hebrew word for spirit, breath, or wind blew over the waters and creation began, likewise, on that Day of Pentecost, the *πνεῦμα*, the Greek word for spirit, breath, or wind was poured out upon the church and continues to be poured out upon us empowering faith in us to obtain union with Christ through that faith that leads us all to the Father. St. Paul reminds us and the church in Ephesus:

¹⁸ for through him [Jesus Christ] both of us (*Jesus and us*) have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God. (Ephesians 2:18-22)

It is through the pure gift from God of the Holy Spirit that faith in the Trinity is received, and it is in the gift of the Holy Spirit that our faith becomes the condition of salvation, our faith models our very Christian existence, and that faith comes to life in our worship. The gift of the Spirit obtains union with Christ and leads us to the Father. John makes this clear throughout this Gospel in that, this Gospel claims that Jesus is the only source of knowledge of the heavenly world. John makes that clear this morning in our lesson:

No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (John 3:13)

With this, Jesus negates the claims of other visionaries that claim to have knowledge of what is in heaven.¹ In other words, we get a glimpse of God only through what is revealed to us in God's Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ and we share a relationship with God through that Word in the same way God shares a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is also revealed in this exchange with Nicodemus when Jesus says:

¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. (John 3:11)

Here in verse 11 in today's Gospel lesson we are taken into the context of worship showing us that when we simply see worship as a hallow ritual or something employed to excite us and entertain us we turn toward ourselves, the flesh and not the Spirit and we reject our encounter with the Word Incarnate and the very presence of Jesus Christ in worship.

Detrick Bonhoeffer truly believed that when the Gospel was purely preached and the Sacraments administered according to the Gospel, it is as if Jesus Christ himself were walking down the center of the congregation. This is what Luther imagined Jesus would say to Nicodemus when he commented on this verse:

As though Jesus were to say: "Do not imagine, Nicodemus, that you can comprehend this matter. You must stick to the sound and the wind, that is, to the Word.

One does not know whence the sound of the wind comes or where it goes."

Here the Lord explains the meaning of the sound. It is the physical Word that one hears, the testimony and the speeches delivered by preachers; in other words, it is the proclamation of the Word of God. In all of Christendom we have nothing greater or more sublime than the Word of God. We hear the sound of the wind; Holy Scripture presents the Word to us everywhere; for instance,...

In Holy Communion bread and wine are of no effect without the Word. Bread would forever remain bread, and wine would remain wine. But when the Word is attached to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that does it, one feels it, as the rushing of the wind is felt. When the Word is heard, then we feel its sound before our ears.²

In Word and Holy Sacrament we hear, we feel, we smell, and we even taste the very presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. With the Holy Word we listen, we discern, we are engaged, and we become directed by our Lord and we literally become one in the Word, and in the body and blood of our Holy Eucharist and through our faith working with these elements we become one and we are in relationship with the Triune God. Or as Jesus says later in this Gospel:

¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. (John 17:11-12)

¹ *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Editors: Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., (emeritus), Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm. (emeritus). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990. 61 The Gospel According to John, page 956.

² Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Luther's Works Volume 22, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 1-4*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957. Page 304. In the use of this passage from Luther, he also referred to Baptism in the same way he does with the Eucharist, but I edited out his comments on Holy Baptism because there was no Baptism scheduled in our worship and focused more on our weekly participation in our Holy Eucharist.

God continues to protect our very souls in the Holy Word and through the Holy Sacraments. It is through these things that we are in relationship with God. As we celebrate this day, the holy triune nature of our heavenly Father, we confess a faith in the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and from the Son. Just as God is in relationship with the Holy Spirit and the Son, through our faith we understand that the same Holy Spirit that has been poured out upon us is sending us to be in relationship with others, so that they too may be in relationship with the Triune God. Through faith we understand that we too proceed from the Father and from the Son and become care and nurturing for other souls. Through the Holy Spirit and through Jesus Christ God has taken into Himself all of humanity so that just as God is one in Jesus Christ and one in the Holy Spirit...through Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit we have the promise that we are one with God for all eternity...

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