

18 May 2008
The Feast of the Holy Trinity

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Worship and Life”

Text: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Acts 2:14a, 22-36; Matthew 28:16-20

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We read and confessed together a moment ago:

Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith.

Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally.

And the catholic faith is this,

that we worship [the Holy Trinity]. (Beginning of the Athanasian Creed)

That’s what this day (commemorating the Holy Trinity) and this creed (celebrating the Holy Trinity) are all about: **worship**.

For that is what the church catholic – meaning the church of all times and all places – has always been about: **worship**.

For Christianity is not first and foremost about morality: following rules and living properly. It is not first and foremost about outreach: doing missions and evangelism. And it is not first and foremost about having the right head knowledge about God, although from speaking this creed earlier it may seem so. All those things are important, but they are not of *first* importance. For none of those things *can* come first. They must all follow and flow from something else. And that something else is **worship**. And not just any worship, but as the creed said, *that we worship the Holy Trinity*. And that is worship that is not about what we do, but what about what God does for us. And what God does for us, in a word, is **life**. For apart from Him we have no life, either physically or spiritually.

And so in other words, whoever desires to be saved and not perish, *must receive life*. Life from God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And so the readings from God’s Word that we heard today were all about life. We

began at the beginning, and heard again how wonderfully and carefully and exactly God made all things. Nothing by chance or evolution; nothing left out. Everything perfect, and perfectly good. And why is that important? Because God did not just create *everything* – He created **you**. As wonderfully and carefully and exactly as God made all things in the beginning, so He has made you. There may be things about you that you don't like, that you wish you could change. But in God's eyes you are who are you for a reason, and a purpose. God made no mistake with you, but gave you life and rejoices in that life. And He sustains your life. You are not your own, or on your own. If you were, you would have perished long ago! But your Father is caring for you, providing for you, and giving you all that you need for this body and life. Because He loves you. And will not stop loving you.

And it is the second reading that shows us just how deep His love is – a love that could not stop, even when it was not returned. For when Adam and Eve decided to love not God, but themselves; when they decided not to receive from God, but grab what they could; when they decided God was not good and followed instead the word of satan . . . God did not reject them. He did not kill them and start over. He did not withdraw and say “Fine! Do it yourself!” In His love He promised a Saviour. A Saviour to defeat the death they had now ushered into the world, and give them life again. Life in a physical resurrection on the last day, and life in a spiritual resurrection now by faith. And so Peter, on that Day of Pentecost, stood up and told the people: **What God had promised, God has done.** He sent His Son. His Son to be the death of death, and give us life again. The physical life we threw away, the spiritual life we threw away, all is restored in Him.

And again, why is that important? Because God did not just save *the world* – He saved **you**. *Your* death He defeated; *your* sin He paid for. Each and every one. Every sin of your thoughts, words, deeds, and desires. He knows them all . . . which we think is not such a good thing! But if He *knows* them all, then you can be sure He *died* for them all, and so now gives you life from the dead in the forgiveness of all your sins. And that is not just a *better* life, but the life that your Father always intended for you to have. Eternal life, with Him. In joy and perfection. For the forgiveness of God is not a partial thing, or an overlooking of sin, but a full remission of sin, and so a full restoration of your life with God. Done completely. Done in love. A love that gives, and will not stop giving.

Which brings us to the Holy Gospel that was read today, and how God is continuing to give His life today. He sends His apostles out to give that life, through teaching

and baptizing. Teaching and baptizing into His Name: the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. For where His name is, there He is. And where He is, there is life. Life through the Spirit of God. For the Father sent the Son, and the Son sends the Spirit, that the Spirit might lead us to the Son, and the Son take us to the Father. So that the relationship we had with God in the beginning be restored. Through the love and forgiveness of God. And that receiving that love and forgiveness, by grace through faith, we then confess the same. **Which is worship.** To receive from God, and to confess Him as the Lord and Giver of life.

Part of that confession we spoke today – all those things we read in the creed – that God is triune, that He is infinite, incomprehensible, eternal, uncreated, almighty. But not just those things. For then we could not know Him, for those things are beyond our understanding. But God wants us to know Him, and to return His love. And so He has revealed Himself to us in His Son. And so in Jesus of Nazareth,

the invisible one was made visible;
the incomprehensible one made Himself comprehensible;
the infinite one enters our finite universe;
the eternal one comes to die;
the almighty becomes a man.

In Jesus, God joins Himself to us, that we might know Him.

In Jesus, God joins Himself to us, that all that is ours become His, and all that is His become ours.

In Jesus, God joins Himself to us, that His life be our life.

The life that we will receive again today, as His forgiveness and life are proclaimed, and as His very life-giving body and blood are placed into our mouths to eat and to drink. That live in Him and He in us. **Which is worship.** The place where heaven and earth come together in Jesus Christ.

And then **from** this worship and life, yes, flows all other things – the good works we will do, the outreach, the care and love for others, the increasing knowledge of His Word. From this worship and life flows the strength to resist the wiles and temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. From this worship and life flows the faith to face the trials and tribulations of this life with confidence and hope. From this worship and life flows our life.

And so today, the Feast of the Holy Trinity, is not just about some dry, abstract doctrines, a long creed, and difficult words – *it is about life.* The life of God, given to us. The life of God, which is not something that we do in order to be saved – but

which is itself salvation. For the life that God gives is true life, which not even death can end. So let us **receive** that life, **live** that life, and **confess** that life. **Which is worship.** Worship that begins here with God and from here flows into all the world.

For this is the catholic faith – the faith that the church of all times and all places has believed:

that God gives and we receive;

that God speaks and we confess what He has told us;

that God gives life and we live His life.

And that is true *ortho-doxy* – right worship, in, with, and under the name that is above all names: the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.