

**The Holy Trinity as Love**  
First Sunday after Trinity  
(From THE EPISTLE. 1 S. John 4. 7)

7. *BELOVED, let us love one another: for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. 8. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. 9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 10. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 12. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. 13. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us; because he hath given us of his Spirit. 14. And we have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 16. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. 17. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement; because as he is, so are we in this world. 18. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment: he that feareth is not made perfect in love. 19. We love him, because he first loved us. 20. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? 21. And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.*

Last Sunday was Trinity Sunday, when we placed special emphasis on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. We recited aloud together the famous Athanasian Creed, which in its 44 verses attempts to define the trinitarian nature of God as comprehensively as possible. As we recall, it is an overwhelming document. We may feel even after we've read it and studied it that there is much that is still way beyond us. Certainly the Creed ably describes the idea of the Three in One as best as this concept could possibly be expressed. But even the Creed admits that God is "one incomprehensible". The existence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit --one God-- yet remains a matter which is accepted on faith, without even beginning to presume that we really have *grasped* this mystery. We joyfully concluded that such great and high truths are among those that produce our worship and wonder, and will require an eternity to fully apprehend.

But this week our Epistle presents a concept about the Holy Trinity which is magnificently simple..., as simple as a four letter word: *God is love...* (1 John 4:8b & 16b); *...he loved us, and sent his Son...* (10b); and *he hath given us of his Spirit* (13b). *God is love.* In these most basic terms, we are presented with a definition for God. It defines not only who He is, but tells us the reason behind all His actions. It assures us of His underlying motive in absolutely everything that He does concerning mankind. *No man hath seen God at any time* (12), it is true, but the Scriptures are giving us a priceless clue as to who He is.

This idea of *love* finds its origin in the very nature of the Triune God. Do you remember Jesus' poignant words in His tender prayer recorder in John 17: *Father,...thou...hast loved them, as thou hast loved me...for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world?* We must infer

from these words that within the life of the Trinity, from eternity past --if one can speak about eternity and time in such terms-- love has always existed. It has always been the principal characteristic of God. The Father has always loved the Son, and the Son loved the Father, and the Holy Spirit, by implication, has also given and received love the same way. Knowing this, we can now dare to conclude that love was the motivator of the original Creation. It was also the reason behind the plan of Redemption. It must even be the basis of the fearful concept of Judgment, when evil and sin will be eternally banished.

That *God is love* is Good News of the highest order for us. Why? Because we are in desperate need of love. To say that "God is holy" is true, but it can hardly be good news for us, as such, because we are not holy. To say that "God is righteous" is also true, but cannot provide us sinners with comfort, but only with fear and dread, because we are not righteous. To say that "God is just" is certainly correct, but if God is to pursue justice, what can we expect if He should choose to give us what we justly deserve? But to say that *God is love* is to tell us what we desperately long to hear but hardly dare to believe ...again, because we know what we really are: not worthy of it. *Love* is the last treatment from God we might ever hope to receive, but it is precisely our greatest need, and our only hope.

For a moment, as we consider this simplest of truths, we can set aside the great Athanasian Creed and breathe a sigh of relief. *Love*, after all, is something we all can understand. Even a newborn infant can recognize it. It is a language that can be readily and instantly comprehended by all of the thousands of the world's people groups. No words are even necessary. Just actions. A touch. A smile. A gift. An embrace. There are great acts of love which involve the sacrifice of one's life for the sake of another. Lives have been given for love of country. But love also cares for a sick relative; or leaves a bouquet on a table; or motivates a bread-winner to life-long devotion to a family. Love prompts a kind word to a depressed soul. Love even endures much abuse and neglect.

Most significantly, from today's Epistle, love is to be that one telling characteristic that identifies those who are the children of the God who *is love*. "Like father, like son": *he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him* (1 Jn. 4:16b). It should be the one Family Characteristic that we all share. As one Gospel chorus puts it:

Love is the flag flown high from the castle of my heart  
When the King is in residence there.  
So let it fly in the sky, let the whole world know  
That the King is in residence there.

Love sends a message. Just as hate also makes a statement --one that is absolutely at odds with the testimony of Christ (see vs. 20 above)-- so does love. And since we are *ambassadors for Christ* (2 Cor. 5:20a), how we act is justly considered representative of the One we claim to stand for if we say we are Christians. In refusing to be critical, judgmental, harshly uncompro-

mising, impatient, unkind, hasty, scornful, impossible to please, but *putting on love* (Col. 3:14) instead, we are providing all the world with a definition for God.

What are the benefits? Think of it! From today's Epistle, they include *boldness in the day of judgment* (17b) and the *casting out of fear* (18b). Well, I don't know about you, but for me... *boldness in the day of judgment* and the banishment of *fear* are among the highest gifts I might ever hope to receive. Those two things in themselves are more precious and valuable than anything this world could possibly provide us. Some day we will realize it!

Whereas last week we were overcome with awe at the sheer greatness of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, this week we should be provoked to worship that same God who reveals Himself to us in the very simplest and most basic of terms. He invites us to yield ourselves to a life-long demonstration of that same Virtue, that others might come to know and love Him, as well.

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*