

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Trinity Sunday  
May 31, 2015

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It is hard to get excited about a *doctrinal* feast. Trinity Sunday is unique in the church's calendar for that very reason. All year Sunday gospels and Holy Days focus on some *historical circumstance* we can visualize. Thanks to the Bible we can picture in our minds the events we commemorate: Jesus in a cradle in Bethlehem, or changing water into wine at Cana, or hanging on a cross on Golgotha. With Trinity Sunday things are different! There is no Bible story graphically showing Father, Son, and Holy Ghost sitting on three thrones and from which radiates Their glory as One God. Our minds are used to *dramatic* scenes between Our Lord and various friends and enemies. The perfect love and harmony of the Holy Trinity seems pretty boring by comparison! There is no dramatic contention in the heavenly realm.

Articulation of belief in the Holy Trinity developed as the Church had need. This is not to say Trinitarian theism was invented! This does not mean the apostles did not regard Jesus as God. They did. He was. And He is! But the development of a Trinitarian formula was made necessary by the rise of errors and blasphemy in the third century. Much in the same way as we did not need traffic laws before the invention of motor cars, so too the Catholic Church did not need theological statements about the Holy Trinity before a segment of her members began to stray off into wrong conclusions about Jesus and His relationship to Almighty God. Once people begin to say what is wrong, it is not enough to *say* they are wrong. You have to go on to say what is right!

Saint Hilary of Poitiers implied the Church developed a Trinitarian statement *reluctantly*. He said, "The errors of heretics and blasphemers force us to deal with unlawful matters, to scale perilous heights, to speak words, to trespass on forbidden ground. Faith ought in silence to fulfill the commandments, worshipping the Father, reverencing with Him the Son, abounding in the Holy Spirit. The error of others compels us to err in daring to embody in human terms truths which ought to be hidden in the silent veneration of the heart."

In the 60th Chapter of Isaiah the sun and moon are dismissed and all the glory of creation steps aside. Why? Because "*Thy God is thy glory.*" Created glory takes a back seat to uncreated glory. God is our glory first of all because *He is*. And we are

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not. That is what the Bible says. “In Him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) “When thou takest away their breath they die, and are turned again to their dust.” (Psalm 104:29) May people never think any more of God than they do of their beating hearts. But that does not change the status of things. It is *man’s existence*, not God’s that is at stake. For: “God giveth snow like wool, and scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes. He casteth forth His ice like morsels: who is able to abide his frost?” (Psalm 147:17) That is the way the Bible talks. That is also the way we should approach our existence. God is our glory because, uncreated, *He is*. And with Saint Hilary we should avoid putting God’s existence into human terms at all, and rather let His attributes remain hidden in the silent veneration of our hearts.

In the fullness of time, of course, the Divine attributes were no longer hidden. God is our glory *because of what He has done*. He created Heaven and earth. In His Own good time He gave us the Beloved Son Who broke down the wall of partition that separated us from God. And the Holy Ghost, coming from the heart of the Father, takes us through Christ back to the Father. Saint Paul sums this all up. “We have access to the Father through the Son, by the Spirit.”

Ever since our day of Baptism each one of us bears the Name of the glory of God. We are baptized “In the Name, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” This is not an incomprehensible formula. It is the full Name of God Who loves us and has come to us that we might be with Him forever. With Saint Hilary we let the inner workings of the Holy Trinity remain hidden in the silent veneration of our hearts. That is where we know that His love is the only origin we have. And like in any family, for us God’s love is home.