

The Good Order of our Loving God
Matthew 28:16-20
The Festival of the Holy Trinity
June 7, 2020

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

Our text, Jesus begins his famous words to this apostles, instituting baptism and the baptismal life that flows from it... begins it all with this declaration, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

If you've ever wondered why it's important to include a Church festival to meditate upon the identity of our God, just look at the streets of our cities. Did the now infamous police officer confess by his actions that he understands himself to be a man under divine authority, that he is to love his fellow man as himself? How many looters and rioters terrorizing cities (according to the 8th commandment, take care to differentiate from *truly* peaceful protestors) do you think are well-catechized and have recently been immersed in theologically sound households and churches, with an education grounded in objective truth revealed to the world by a God who loves it as opposed to an education grounded in ever-evolving subjectivism that begins and ends with "me, myself, and I" *being* the only true god?

But, my guess is, ask many of those same people – officer and rioter alike – if they believe in 'god,' and a good share might well

say ‘yes.’ They’re not necessarily all atheists, but their ignorance of exactly who the true God is still leads to arrogance or despair, which yields hatred toward others, authoritarianism, crime, and self-serving lawlessness... whether an individual supposedly above the law or a mob supposedly without the law.

Now, before going further with this illustration, please don’t think I’m suddenly injecting politics into the sermon. We must learn to always interpret daily life not as mere voters or opinion-poll respondents, but as children of God. We must learn to interpret current events not by the gospel according to ABC, MSNBC, CNN or Fox News, but according to the Word of God. What the officer (going beyond his authority) did to a fellow man is always a transgression against the commandment, “You shall not murder” – even if a jury of peers would say otherwise. What the looters and rioters have done to injure and kill police and break in and steal livelihoods is always a transgression of “You shall not murder” and “You shall not steal” – even if the media and partisans want to excuse it for what they think is a winning political narrative. To make the demands currently being made by some – including demands for societal handouts at the expense of other families and their children – is always a sin against the commandment, “You shall not covet” – even if society’s policymakers shrivel and ‘bend the knee’ to the demands.

You see, everything about this entire two week’s societal fiasco *screams* “Have we forgotten who is God?!”

If people not only theoretically believed in ‘a god,’ but also knew who He was, rejoiced in His love, kept and cherished and safeguarded His holy will, what you’ve seen on the news this week would only be in TV legal dramas, and the reporting you’ve heard by a media rationalizing lawless riots would be rejected for the theologically-empty foolishness that it is.

Martin Luther forcefully spoke out against the riots of his day, known as the Peasants’ Revolt, even though the German peasants had seen him as a social hero, and (it could also be argued) they perhaps had more “systemic” reason to riot. And yet, Luther was right to speak against them because he knew that the one true God is a God of created order, holy will, divine vengeance against evil, and gracious favor and mercy toward the penitent. But, *without* such knowledge, theological and thus practical anarchy reigns.

So, we do well to understand that the Festival of the Holy Trinity is not a day in which we meditate upon a ‘theoretical deity,’ a pie-in-the-sky divinity that has no bearing on daily life. Instead, we confess the one true God who created this world and redeemed it from its own undoing, and now makes disciples ‘out of the world’ and sanctifies them with His Word of objective and eternal Truth.

Thus, the readings for today take a very simple pattern in teaching the work of our Triune God: the Old Testament reading speaks of His creating work; the Second reading describes His justifying work; the Gospel reading proclaims that that justification

He applied to us individually in His daily-life sanctifying work. And, in briefly meditating upon these, we are taught who our God is; and we are given peace, comfort, and good order for daily life.

First, what does the Creation teach us about our God? What does our Old Testament reading tell us of *Him* and, therefore, of *us*? Of Him, it says that He is a God who has perfect plans for His creation, takes interest in creation, is ‘hands on’ in dealing with creation... it says he created things in good order, to produce life in good order, and still takes care of all things, even providing all things for this body and life.

But, that means, of *us*, the fallen Creation speaks loudly and clearly that we who were supposed to be in God’s image are not. After all, we do not live according to good order and love for good order; we live self-servingly, self-defensively... often only concerned about how this creation and its inhabitants serve me, whether they’re getting more than me, why life isn’t fair for me. Our daily life is soiled with a sin that does not echo or convey good order, but self-idolatry that sees itself above the law, even God’s Law! And, as such, our egos grow so bold that we think we can question God’s good order and His plans.

When Job questioned God, interestingly the Lord appealed to his authority as *the Creator* – that’s how much that first article speaks to His true identity – He appealed to his authority as the Creator and said, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of

the earth... fixed its measurements... stretched a measuring line across it?"

Yes, the Lord will not have us forget that He is our Creator; for, when we do, when we are taught to think life evolves from nothing and autonomously rules itself, cares for and heals itself, is supposed to provide for itself... and then (having forgotten our Creator) we begin to wonder why the creation isn't providing for us the way we've demanded... we begin to scratch and claw, hate our neighbors, bite and devour one another, and such 'survival of the fittest' struggles leave the world in tyranny and cities in flames – cheering the strong over the weak, power in numbers, and abandoning our neighbor to despair.

And then, in that delusional despair, people think that – if there is a god who is going to rescue them, such rescue must be political; it must be a worldly-kingdom rescue, a revolution that will better serve them. But they have forgotten that their great enemy is not the tyrant, but they themselves!... whose sinful infighting and greed created, then lost out to, and thus propped up the worldly tyrant their sin created! So then, it is not the tyrant of bad social order from whom we need to be rescued, but our own sin.... The tyranny of eternal death of our own making.

Thus, the second article of the Creed teaches us that the God who created us saw the mess we've made for ourselves and he has sought to rescue us from ourselves. To do that, good order must be

re-established, and that can only happen through justice against sin and victory over tyranny. Therefore, our Creator became one with His own creation, became Man alongside mankind – not sinful and debased, as the rest of the children of fallen Adam – but holy and pure as the perfect Man of Eden would have been... perfect and holy through the virgin birth, as conceived by the plans of the Almighty through the workings of the Holy Spirit.

It is absolutely essential not to bypass this point – as the Athanasian Creed says: “It is also necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the *incarnation* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Apart from the incarnation, our God is distant and removed from us, the “unknown god” to whom the Athenians in Paul’s day and the whole world before and since have appealed in ignorance... an unknown god who does not help his creation, who is absent in times of trouble, who makes no promises but leaves people in every chaotic situation void of good order crying out, “Where is god in any of this?” The new gospel becomes “social justice”!

But, in the incarnation, God is not only “not unknown,” but he is also “not far removed” from us. The Christ of God became flesh and dwelt among us as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In Him was life, the restoration of all things sacred and holy and full of good order. And, for us and our salvation, for our hope in the restoration of good order, unity with God, the putting down of chaos leading to eternal death... Christ fulfilled God’s good order, became the

sacrifice for sins, and quelled God's wrath against our injustice and won the peace of divine justice for the Creation. He purchased mankind out of the tyranny of our own lawlessness and established by his blood the good order of His own divine kingdom. St Peter says it this way in his Pentecost sermon: "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of *lawless* men." (That's man's natural way, isn't it? In his greed and selfishness, he believes his lawlessness will gain him everything. Instead he destroys that which is best for him, even the Christ. But God's plans will not be undone ... instead, "This Jesus, God raised up, and of that we are witnesses," Peter says. And he concludes, "Let all the house of Israel (indeed, let the whole *Creation*) therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Yes, God has made him Lord – no longer are we under the tyranny of our own sin; we are now under Christ. Such does not mean mercy leading to anarchy ("Jesus will forgive me, so anything goes"); rather, it means God's good order restored, and his mercy toward the penitent who see the Truth that they malign that good order at every turn... good order according to the Holy Will (Law) and mercy toward the penitent (Gospel)... such is the reign of Jesus, Lord and Christ, that man might live according to that Truth, freed from the condemnation of our sin, freed from the tyranny of the devil, and free to again be people of God.

But, what Christ has won for us, he must apply to us... for, left to our own devices, we continue to devour one another, like a mob who – having heard the good news that their cause has been vindicated – will not believe it until they get to declare it for themselves. What fools we are, wanting to declare our own victory rather than be content in the victory of our Lord and Christ!

And so, He must personally bestow the victory upon us and teach us how to live through a new lens that sees we are free from depending on such sinful self-rule. For, where we live free from our sin, we live free from our self-made tyranny and lawlessness.

Thus, the Third article teaches us what it means that our Lord and Christ – who has been given all authority - has used it mercifully to share the spoils of war with His Church and make us his own... *not our own (above the law or without the law)*, but also no longer under a law of condemnation, but now under a law of love. The Third article teaches us that, and *how* he has done it and how he *continues* to sustain us in it and continues to teach us to live under him in his kingdom, to live in a process of being made holy and being taught to live as children of God... a sanctification that lives in faith of Him and with fervent love toward one another. Being daily drowned is the foolishness of our self-idolization, the irrationality and silliness of our greed and supposed self-rule.

Our gospel reading teaches it this way: Jesus says to his apostles, “Going therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing

them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” (yes, in baptism, bring them into the identity of my Kingdom, Jesus says) “and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Notice the good order of this instruction to the apostles... the perfect order that safeguards us from the lawlessness of sin by bringing us by forgiveness into a right relationship with God and then teaching us what it means to live according to that beautiful order and holy will... His kingdom is a making of disciples, a deliverance of all the benefits, and also a teaching of all that is true and right about the God who created us and redeemed us, about our own fallen propensity to reject him, and about our need to be defended, strengthened, and sustained in our baptism against our Old Adam propensity toward ‘self above law’, rioting, chaos. Instead, we learn in sanctification all things whatsoever that God has commanded: we learn that we have a God who loves us, forgives us, and frees us to be His people... a God who sustains us, strengthens us, and keeps us... a God who teaches us to trust Him and thus how to love others... a God who teaches us to live in peace – not mere worldly lack of violence, but divine peace that comes from knowing ours is a God of love, good order, and final deliverance out of this brokenness and into the life of the world to come... and that faith then breeds *more* than mere “letting go of grip” on worldly ways... and more than mere sympathy toward those whose mindset is stuck on life in this fallen

world; it breeds true love of neighbor as myself and a true desire to share with them the safety that is ours, the good order that is ours, the love that is ours – and *theirs* – from God through Christ Jesus.

Indeed, when we know who God truly is and what He has done and continues to do for us, all of daily life is quieted and redefined... redefined by the Trinity's worldview and by the promise that "neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything in all creation shall separate us from the love of" our Triune God revealed to us in the incarnate Jesus, our Lord and Christ. Or, as the psalmist says it, "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken."

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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