

John 8:48-59
The Festival of the Holy Trinity
June 15, 2025

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

Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'"

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In the last few weeks, we have heard Jesus pray in his High Priestly Prayer for two things: (1) to be **glorified** by the Father – “Father, glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You” and (2) **unity** for the Church – “that they may be one, just as you, Father, are in Me, and I in you, that they may also be in us.”

This morning, we hear Jesus comment similarly in an earlier conversation with the Jews, speaking *explicitly* of glory and *implicitly* of unity. Glory with the Father; unity with the Father... even as the Jews claim Jesus is a *Samaritan* (the opposite of *glory* in a Jew’s eyes) and is demon-possessed (not at *unity* with the Father, but completely at *odds* with – enemy of – God). Jesus answers, “You claim, ‘He is our God’!” – meaning, they *claim* their supposed *unity* with God and, thereby, they claim to share the *glory* of God! But, “It is the Father who glorifies *Me*, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’!” In other words, how can you be in unity with God if He shares His glory with the Son but *you reject* the Son, the very Messiah He has sent.

This is also true for us: how can you share the glory of the Father if you reject the Son, the Messiah He has sent? To have unity with the Father you must have unity with the Son – “No one comes unto the Father but by Me.” To share the glory of the Father, you must recognize the glory of the Son. And the glory of the Son, the glory He shares with the Father, is the plan of salvation – once promised and fulfilled in history, now forever to be heralded to the nations – **that the Son became flesh** and went to the cross as our substitute, to atone for our sins and be our salvation. In other words... **that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity became man**, taking the name Jesus, embracing the cross and ignoring its shame, that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that this incarnate and true man is Lord, to the *glory* of God the Father.

This is God’s glory, precisely because it is your salvation... your salvation, meaning your *reconciliation* with God – renewed unity with God! – just as He promised by His grace through the Christ, so that the completed reality glorifies Him by proving His age-old plans and promises to be true and trustworthy.

Trustworthy and true, so that we ought with the most solemn gravity consider the words we just confessed in the Athanasian Creed: “It is also necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the **incarnation** of our Lord Jesus Christ.” What does that mean, “to *believe* the incarnation” of Christ? Simply to

believe it *happened*? Is there any doubt in that?... as Jesus Christ is the most well-documented person in all of ancient history? If you cannot believe in the existence of Jesus, you cannot believe in the existence of anyone! Or, does it mean to trust that the incarnation of Jesus Christ was the carrying out of God's plans for *your* salvation. There is the "wisdom of God... the master workman at His side, who even from the foundations of the earth is the Lamb slain for our salvation, even as that promise was first made in the first moments of the Fall? Yes, this is His glory... that sinners everywhere confess His saving love in the Christ and therefore rejoice "He is our God!" This is *His* glory, and *your* "glorious confidence" (the Lutheran hymn calls it). The heart of our faith; the foundation of our faith; the hope of our faith – just as it was the faithful longing of Abraham... that the great "I AM" would come in the flesh, so that no one less than the "I AM" occupies the cross on our behalf to atone for our sins, and to secure our salvation.

Now, we have spoken much already of the Father and the Son. But, of course, our faith and hope is not regarding the God who is Two Persons, but Three. This Festival is just as much regarding the Holy Spirit as it is of the Father and of the Son... that Holy Spirit who with the Father and the Son – in *unity* with the Father and Son – is "worshipped and *glorified*." *Glorified*, not by focusing on the Spirit Himself (for He Himself only and always points to Christ!), but glorified by our joy in the ways He points us to and gives us Christ!

What glory would it bring the Holy Spirit if we despise the Baptism in which He is gifted to those who are adopted as sons? – “Repent and be baptized, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!” Does that promise, which *unites* us with God, not glorify Him? So, how can we despise it as our very identity for every day of life?

Or, what glory would it bring the Holy Spirit if we despise preaching and His Word, which is “the Sword of the Spirit” of Truth? And, if faith comes by hearing, does it not unite us with God and bring Him glory? So, how can we despise such Divine Rest each week? Does it not glorify Him that we come to His temple to Hear His Word?

Or, what glory would it bring the Holy Spirit if we despise the Sacrament of Christ’s body and blood – the very gift Christ promised that the Spirit of Truth would bring to our remembrance. Does the Sacrament not strengthen our faith and keep us in unity with God (just as we heard last week, that the early Church in unity gathered around the doctrine and the breaking of the bread)? And thereby it brings Him glory. Not glory because we supposedly carry out some *memorials* of His plans and promises, but glory because these visible signs carry the very substance and gifts of His promises... promises that baptismally bring us into and keep us in unity with God and therefore glorify Him in our joy over the forgiveness at His altar and in our Christian love and daily lives of confession before men.

And those daily lives and confession before men are lived out in unity with God and glory for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit *when our lives confess* His Name into which we have been baptized. Such is our fervent desire, so that it is even the focus of the non-festival half of the church year we now enter. Consider that: if the festival half of the year (which we now depart) is about the life of *Christ*, the non-festival half of the year we now enter is (if you will) about the life of *the Christian*. And the life of the Christian is to always confess the Holy Trinity who, in our baptism, named us with His own name: “I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And, to what end? To what end does our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier claim us as His own? – certainly, our salvation (“Baptism now saves us”, the epistle declares), but also for our discipleship and confession: “Make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them all things I have given you.” In other words, *unity* with God to the *glory* of His Name.

Or, consider it the way St Paul says to the Galatians: “In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the **adoption** (baptismal adoption) of sons (the identity of sons). And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts (notice that, true unity with God, the Spirit, and His Son – true unity with God, that we may glorify His Name

how? By *prayer*, so that Paul concludes), “God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’”

So, a life of prayer, of discipleship, of Christian love... a life kept in our salvation by dependence upon Word and Sacrament, received in true repentance and confidence in Christ’s saving work for our forgiveness... these are the fruits of the Spirit that evidence our unity with God and give Him glory.

Thus, we ought not be surprised that the end of the Athanasian Creed confesses as it does, for it is merely describing the difference between how God looks upon those who are united with Him by Christ Jesus versus those who are not reconciled to Him because they reject Christ Jesus. The Athanasian Creed speaks of doing good, of “being judged” concerning their own deeds; and some Christians may be confused by this because we know we are saved by Christ alone and the saving sacrifice of his cross.

But the end of the Creed is merely a confession of Matthew 25, in which Jesus describes the last day and says that when He returns in glory, He will judge those who have rejected Him *and* judge those who have utterly depended upon their unity with Him. Of those who *rejected* Him, they will stand in their sins and be judged for themselves, “I was hungry, you gave me nothing to eat; thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink, a stranger, and you did not welcome me.” No matter if the wicked ever displayed such earthly niceties to their fellow man, they did it outside of unity with God,

outside of dependence upon God's Christ, and therefore they bring no glory to His Name, but only condemnation to their own... and they having done evil will enter into eternal fire.

But, because you know your utter need for Jesus, and because you would not dare be so proud to want to be judged for your own righteousness, but know that your unity with God is only because of the blood and merit of Jesus Christ, and because you are reconciled to God by Christ Jesus and all your sins have been removed and forgotten as far as the east is from the west, therefore, He will say to you, "Come, blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you" – and then He will speak of your works, for your sins have been washed away and all that is left is faith's love of neighbor – "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, thirsty and you gave me something to drink, a stranger and you welcomed me... whenever you did this to the least of my brothers, you did it to me."

Hear this carefully; this image of Matthew 25, and the Athanasian Creed as it confesses it, nowhere says that your works save you. Rather, it says that – by the blood and merit of Christ Jesus – you live in unity with God and that your life of faith in God and fervent love toward your neighbor brings glory to His Name.

Thus, we enter the non-festival half of the year, a focus on the Christian life of faith and love, not that you may learn how to save yourself, but that you may learn how to wear the Triune Name

in a manner that confesses your unity with God and glorifies the blessed Trinity. Or, as the baptismal hymn says regarding your baptismal life in Christ Jesus,

“So use it well! You are made new –
In Christ a new creation!
As faithful Christians, live and do
Within your own vocation(s),
Until that day when you possess
His *glorious* robe of righteousness
Bestowed on your forever.”

And, if such is your life – a life of repentance and forgiveness, of reconciliation with God and fellow Christian, of faith in God and fervent love for one another – then, safe in Christ Jesus the great “I AM,” you may truly and joyfully say of the Almighty, “He is our God!”

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

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