

## The Feast for the Mystery of the Holy Trinity

### Isaiah 6:1-8

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, thrice holy.* Somehow, the number three seems to us to be a number of fullness, of perfection. It takes three legs for a stool to stand; having only two, it will tip over. And although it is said that two is company whereas three is a crowd, it is possible, and it often happens, that two people become so involved with one another that their twosomeness becomes an impediment to serving God in a life of love; as they do not really relate to or care about anybody other than one another, their twosomeness becomes pure selfishness, although there is nothing pure about it, because it is but a perversion of love. Twosomeness is not completion; in this regard, also, it really takes more than two for love to be a true reflection of the love that is the nature of God.

In the early Church, when the topic of the Trinity was a heavily debated one, that is: the threefoldness of the one God as Father and Son and Holy Spirit, some of our fathers made observations much alike to these with reference to, well, with reference to the Trinity. Some of these observations might come off as embarrassing attempts to define the nature of God by the standards of this world. Some might even seem as attempts to take the Almighty One captive, to restrain and restrict Him as to who He is allowed to be with the categories of our own wisdom, which would be blasphemous. Obviously, God must be who He is, regardless of our thinking. One might reasonably argue, though, that perhaps the sense of fullness the threefoldness of so many things in this world conveys is a reflection of who He is, who is the Fount and Founder of all things, and of reality itself, rather than the other way around. So there is that.

Be that as it may, *holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.* Thrice holy is He who is whole and complete in His glory, and in His goodness, and in His being God. He is Father and Son and Spirit, and the Father is holy, and God, fully and completely, and full and complete in His glory and in His goodness and in His being God, and so is the Son, and so is the Spirit. Neither of these is but one third of God, but neither is either but another appearance of another, or another manifestation. Nor are there three gods; this is the clear confession God had His servant Moses lay in the mouths and upon the minds and hearts of His people, the summary of His covenant: *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

Even after God had revealed Himself to not only be one, but also three, in that our Lord Jesus had been made manifest as God Himself, and also the Holy Spirit, James, servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, would in the very same terms summarise what it means, at the most elementary level, to believe that the true God exists: *You believe that God is one; well, good for you. Even the demons believe—and shudder!* In other words, God being one is the most basic fact of the faith, that which even demons know, even though merely knowing this is *not* faith unto salvation.

So God is one, and holy, and whole and complete in Himself. As the Father is whole and complete in Himself, and wholly and completely God, so is the Son, and so is the Holy Spirit. And God being holy and whole and full and complete in His glory is not in any way diminished by Him being three and not only one, any more than it is by Him not only being three, but also one.

Now, if this does not make sense to you, that God is three persons and yet but one God, you need not worry about it. Nor do I, by the way: at least today I am not to blame if someone does not understand what I am saying. Well, today it is not my fault *only*, at least. I myself have never understood all this, nor has anybody else, by the way, ever, other than God Himself, and perhaps the angels; all through history, all who have claimed to understand have been those who taught that there are three gods, or that our Lord Jesus is not really God, or once was not, or that the Spirit is not God, or that in some other way the one God is not three persons, as Holy Scripture teaches.

It is just not given to us to know all the intricacies of the innermost nature of God; what is given to us is to know that God is holy, and wholly and completely so, so as to be *thrice* holy, and Father and Son and Holy Spirit, whole and complete in His glory, and in His goodness, and in being God.

Knowing God to be holy, and whole and complete in His goodness, exactly that was what put His Prophet in a panic when confronted with the glory of God: *Woe is me, as we hear it today that he exclaimed in anguish and agony, for I am done for. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!*

Nothing and no one impure can persevere in His presence, who is holy. His whole and holy goodness burns as a ferocious fire of fury against all evil. And all that is not in accordance with His goodness *is* evil: ungodliness and unbelief, which *is* ungodliness, impurity, imperfection. As He has had His holy Apostle John write it:

*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. Before His goodness all evil must be destroyed as darkness by the light, and everything and all that has evil in it. And we who have evil in us, ungodliness and impurity, must be destroyed before Him, also, into His judgement of eternal death and endless dying in the fire that is prepared for the evil one and his angels.*

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. As the holy One is one, so is the love His creatures owe to Him, and which He also actually does demand of us, undivided love, unquestioning obedience. Anything less is incomplete and impure and evil; as the Prophet found himself condemned, not only for the impurity of his own lips, that is: for all ungodly or unfruitful words he had spoken himself, but also for those spoken around him. *I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips**

Any hint of impurity or imperfection or ungodliness or unbelief makes each and every one of us unclean before the holiness of God, as does even any and all association with anything evil or impure or incomplete. The Law God gave to His people in days of old illustrates this by teaching that a dead body is unclean, and a woman having her bleedings, and anyone having bodily emissions, and anyone who comes in contact with either is unclean, also. All these are manifestation of death, of loss of life, which is the beginning of death, and death is evil, and abominable to the God of life. And although these rules and regulations no longer stand, they still stand in Holy Scripture as an illustration of how even the slightest hint of evil is all evil before the holy One. And what we should learn from them is that sinning, as we all do, in little or in much, and having sin in us, we cannot but stand condemned before Him whose goodness is, again, a ferocious fire of fury against all evil, ungodliness and unbelief and impurity and imperfection. And this does not mean that God is evil, and it would be blasphemous of anyone to even suggest that, rather, we ourselves are evil. God is good, and whole and complete in His goodness, that is, again: holy.

And confronted with the holy goodness of God, the Prophet could not but despair to find himself cursed and condemned by the judgement of God against sinners, His righteous wrath against all wrong and wrongdoing, the hatred of His holy goodness against all evil and impurity and incompleteness.

But by the whole and complete goodness of God His servant was delivered from the just judgement of God, rescued from the wrath of His righteousness.

Another servant of His held a burning piece of live coal to the mouth of the Prophet and proclaimed: *Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt has been taken away, and your sin atoned for.* Such is our salvation, who are by nature sinful and unclean, and have sinned against God in thought and word and deed, and still do. He has the men He places as Pastors in His Church declare to us how our guilt has been taken away and our sin atoned for, with His own authority, so that what they speak at His command is what goes: our guilt is actually taken away because our sin has indeed been atoned for. And He lays in our mouths His Word of salvation in praise and prayer, by which we not only speak of His salvation, but also speak His salvation upon ourselves, and actually have it given to us, fully and for real, forgiveness for all our sins and shortcomings, rescue from eternal death and damnation, and eternal life with Him in the fullness of His glory.

Frightening it must have been to the Prophet, now aware of his impurity before the holy One, to see the heavenly being approaching, burning coal in hand, coming ever closer to his lips; we are not told whether or not it hurt, though, having a piece of burning coal held to his mouth. Perhaps the Prophet did not consider the pain worthy of mention afterward, compared to the precious Truth that *your guilt has been taken away, and your sin atoned for.* Or perhaps it did not hurt at all; we cannot say, for Holy Scripture does not.

To many, though, it is a painful thing to take the Word of the salvation of God in their mouths, let alone take it to heart; after all, it is the Word of what the Son of God had to suffer for us, and God Himself, in fact, since the Son of God is Himself God. It is the Word of how evil our sin is, and we ourselves, who not only have sin in us, but also actually *sin*, that we are guilty of His sufferings. But it is also the Word of the goodness of God, that He who is Himself God from eternity would Himself suffer for us, in our stead and on our behalf, the judgement of His holy goodness against all about us that is evil and abominable to Him, the evil and injustice we did to Him, and do.

His Word of salvation does burn; it burns with the fire from His heavenly altar, the holy love that is in the Father and the Son and the Spirit, full and complete, the greatest love of all, the salvation of sinners, mine and yours.

We have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith. Let us worship the undivided Trinity, for *He* has saved us.