

Grace and peace to you . . .

Because of the grace of almighty God alone, the Holy Spirit gives you the ability to confess the true faith. That confession begins with these words: “I believe in one God.” Yet even as you confess that you fear, love and trust in the one and only true God, you are bound to repeat His name: “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” So the Spirit gives you grace and voice to confess that “the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, yet there are not three Gods, but one God.” In fact, “just as [you] are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each Person to be our God and Lord, so [you] are also forbidden by the catholic religion to say, ‘There are three Gods or three Lords.’”

This grace of God poured out on you generously by the Holy Spirit gives you the faith to believe and the voice to confess that the true God is God in three Persons, the blessed Trinity. And so you “acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity while at the same time worshiping the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty.” For “this is the catholic faith: unless a person believe this firmly and faithfully, he cannot be saved.”

But who can understand such things? Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain it. So why bother much with it? And besides, what difference does it make in your day to day existence?

Here, it is good to take to heart the account of the frightened man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night. He is frightened because he does not want to be seen talking to Jesus. Rather than boldly confess his faith, he is afraid. He is afraid that he’ll be disowned by the Pharisees, and persecuted by the people. He wishes to be a disciple, but secretly, for fear of the Jews. So Nicodemus sneaks around at night, hiding in the shadows, wishing to see Jesus and speak with Him. And what does he say? “Jesus, how can you do these things, how can you heal the sick, preach with authority, change water to wine, and act with such boldness, such confidence and audacity? No one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him. So, certainly, God must be on your side!”

But the remarkable thing is not what Nicodemus says to Jesus. The remarkable thing is how Jesus calms the man’s fear and strengthens his faith. In effect, Jesus says, “Nicodemus, you are worried and troubled about many things. You are so afraid of being caught, so afraid that your Lord and God will let you down, so afraid that you will have to fight your own battles and fend for yourself. Fear has taken hold of you, and pain. Because of your fear, you are not only

paralyzed in what you do, but paralyzed in what you believe. Your fear is greater than your faith. Your fear is not only running your life, for it demands that you come to Me by night. Your fear has become your life. But take heart. For I give you My word: whoever is born again, born of water and the Spirit, he will see and enter the kingdom of God.”

Like Nicodemus, has your life been taken over by fear? Life has its way of surprising you, and not all the surprises are pleasant. What have you been through since you were a child? What tragedies have befallen you and your family, tragedies that suffocate hope? What dark sins have you committed; what ungodly thoughts have fouled your purity? Has the dull throb of daily life deadened your zeal and your faith? What fears of the looming future spoil your sunny days? How does the one, true Faith effect you in your darkest hours? Where does the Triune God fit into your lack-luster life?

What words of comfort the Lord Jesus speaks to frightened Nicodemus! He does not say, “Have a little confidence in yourself. Believe in yourself and the strength of your convictions. Know that you’re doing what is right.” Christ never invites or urges you to turn into yourself and look to your own abilities and choices. Rather, He always points to what He gives and promises, and what He plants within you. And He does this, not so you can choose it for yourself, but so that you might know and believe that all things come from Him, and that apart from Him you have no life.

Christ comforts Nicodemus by pointing him to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Whoever is born of water and the Spirit shall enter the Kingdom of God. And whoever enters the kingdom of God is embraced by God, and has God fighting for him, and lives from whatever the Lord God chooses to give, and can be undone by nothing. Water and the Spirit—Baptism done by God into God’s Name—that is your comfort, your strength, your help, your consolation, your joy, your peace, your song. The Baptism God gives calms and settles you, gives you the peace the world cannot give, and allows you to stand firm and straight in the face of all trials, afflictions, sicknesses, distresses, heartaches, hardships and adversities. Baptism into Christ Jesus sees you through your darkest days. You are no longer of the night nor of darkness. You are a son of light and of the day.

That is the comfort the Lord Jesus speaks to frightened Nicodemus as he stands in the dark. But those words are not just meant for Nicodemus to hear and believe. Those comforting words Jesus also speaks to you. And in doing so, He urges you to remember and rejoice in your Baptism. There you received

forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil and eternal salvation. And beyond that, you also received God Himself—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—as your God, the God who fights for you, the God who sees you through all turmoil, the God who lives within you, the God who loves you with a love that is stronger than death.

What comforting words! What a blessed and gracious promise! The Holy Father, Holy Son and Holy Spirit devote their whole being and existence to your life and your salvation. The Father, by creating you and giving you life; and then sending His Son into the world. The Son, by suffering your sins to His death, and thereby being the only life you have. And the Spirit, by breathing that life back into you, and thereby declaring you holy and righteous in the Lord's sight.

So blessed be the Holy Trinity, and the undivided Unity! Praise and glorify His name! For He has shown His mercy upon you by water and the Spirit. And by this Holy Baptism, you have rebirth and renewal, and live forever in the Lord's kingdom, partaking of His divine nature. That is God's gift to you this day. May God keep you in this Faith every day of your life in this world, and every endless day in the world to come. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes . . .