

Trinity Sunday Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

by the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

We are half-way through the Church year, and Trinity Sunday is the fulcrum, the turning point. We celebrate today what God has made known to us, the fullness of his saving self-revelation, and we shall in the next weeks consider how we are to live, in response to and in accord with that revelation.

We get today with John a glimpse of our end, a peek into heaven, and of the glory and worship and life and joy which shall be ours. Jesus himself speaks of this new end, not in hell and perishing, but in heaven and eternal life. John 17.3 says, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Our end and purpose and goal is worship. For this we have been created; for this we have been redeemed. We were made to worship. This Christian worship is to

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be led by the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, to the Father.

Christian worship is Trinitarian. John 4.23 reads, “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” This true and spiritual worship of God occurs through the truth as revealed, made known in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

To know God and Jesus Christ - this is our eternal life. That is to know the one true and only God, who is Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And how do we come to this life, this knowledge? It is first of all a matter of faith, of faith in Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This is a spiritual, heavenly truth, and we can know it only by believing in what Jesus reveals. And who is this Jesus? He is the man who came down from heaven. He is first and eternally God, the Son of God who is in heaven. And he became man, the son of man. This God-man died on the cross to save us from sin and death, bore the punishment for our sins, and died and descended even into death,

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that we might not be lost, but rather enjoy eternal life. And there is no other way into heaven , into the knowledge and life of God, but through this Jesus who came down from heaven, died for us, descended, rose again and ascended. And he gives us this life by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The issue in the Gospel reading for today is the knowledge of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit. It is about how God reveals himself through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. That Gospel about revelation is matched by an Epistle about worship. For when we say that our end and eternal life lies in the knowledge of God, we do not mean some cold, detached recognition. We mean something more like the acknowledgement of God. To know God, to acknowledge God, as God, is to worship him. That is our end, to worship him. Think only of the very first petition of the Lord's Prayer, Hallowed be thy name. God's name is what he has shown, revealed to us of himself, and we

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pray that we may reverence that revelation, and worship him in that knowledge.

Think of the first table of the law, the Ten Commandments.

They are all about acknowledging, or worshipping, the one true God, who is a spirit, who gifts us with his name and whom we acknowledge in the ordering of our time, our work and our rest.

What do they teach us but to love God - the one God - with all our heart, the God who is a spirit with all our soul, the God who has made himself known to us with all our mind, and the God who created the world and our bodies, who gives us work with all our strength. The knowledge and love of God come together, they culminate in worship. And we are there lost in wonder, love and praise. But to this worship you must give and apply yourself, in heart and soul and mind and strength.

Our lesson today is an invitation to worship, to the worship of heaven. See again how the Trinity, the one God who is thrice holy,

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is declared here. John sees a door, not closed but now opened into heaven. Jesus said, “I am the door.” And that door was opened on the cross by his piercing and death for us. Heaven is opened for Jesus and by Jesus. “When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.” That door is a door through which John both sees and enters. It is a door of revelation and salvation. And he is led through this door to the knowledge and worship and life of God, in the Spirit. It is in the Spirit and through Jesus Christ, that we come into heaven, to the knowledge and worship of God, which is eternal life. There we find all of creation, joined by the redeemed both from before Christ and after Christ, in the unending worship of God, singing everlastingly to the blessed Trinity.

Today we celebrate what God has made known to us of himself. We celebrate that we know God, supreme above and beyond and before all, outside of time and space and all creation and

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finitude, our Creator, who is our Father, and Jesus our Lord and Saviour, in the Holy Spirit. We know, as Jesus taught, that there is but one God alone, and that Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit are one, in glory and life and purpose with the Father.

There have been and continue to be many errors about the Trinity. We call the true faith of the Trinity “orthodoxy.” But is it not just some cold question of getting it right. This true faith is a matter of acknowledging and worshipping the one God - Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Orthodoxy does not really mean right faith; it means right worship. Listen to the way in which the Athanasian Creed puts the point: “Now the Catholic Faith is, that we worship one God in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity.” Right belief, or orthodoxy, is about right worship. The Catholic faith is that we worship the Triune God - the Father, the son and the Holy Ghost. The supreme expressions of this are in the Eucharist - our lifting up and joining in the angel’s song of heaven, the Sanctus, Holy, Holy

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Holy - and in the Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer in the Gloria Patri, Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. We offer these services on a regular basis, to help prepare and train ourselves for the life of heaven, and to introduce us to, and to invite the world to, the joy of that endless praise.

Now I am not so out of it, yet, not to have some suspicions as to what your reactions may be to the idea of endless worship. In our day, we tend to regard worship not as an end but a means, something to make us feel good, which surely should be achievable in an hour or less. We see it as a means of expressing or encouraging certain values, rites or rituals that form memories and communities.

But God is not a means but an end - THE end - and the knowledge and love of God, the worship of God, is the very end for which we were created. Endless worship, singing everlastingly, does not mean sitting through a stream of my sermons and having to pretend to enjoy the third hour, nor does it mean trying to cheerfully

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sing your least favourite hymn for eternity. But it does mean, here and in this life and world, seeking to make everything in life an act and part of worship. It means the grateful acknowledgement of God in everything, in all times and places.

In our Catechism, in the supplementary instruction, there is another statement of this view, about the church this time. This is what I am trying to say. The question is, what is the work of the Church in the world? The work of the church in the world is to offer to God on behalf of all people the worship which is his due; to make known to all people the gospel of Jesus Christ; and to unite all people to God in one family. I invite you to re-dedicate yourselves and this congregation to that God-given purpose and mission and end. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.