

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

It used to be that people felt sorry for their sin.  
They used to have this strange feeling called “guilt.”  
And it would eat away at them.

This guilt would overwhelm them.  
They’d sweat and worry, cry and feel sick to their stomach.  
We hear in the Psalms,  
    **“every night I flood my bed with tears,  
    my couch is drenched with weeping”** (Ps 6:6).  
Their soul was in anguish, and their body suffered on account of it all.

*That’s how it used to be.*

Today, we’re rarely in anguish over our sin.  
In fact we think and act as if we had no sin—  
    perhaps some faults, but everyone’s got those.

Our greatest fear isn’t actually sin,  
    but getting *caught* in our sin.

No longer do we suffer any anxiety over offending God—  
    but we feel rotten when we’re caught by man.

That’s how it is with cheating,  
    whether it’s cheating on your spouse or a test or on your taxes.

We feel little remorse before God,  
    but we dread getting caught by man.

And when this is the case,  
    when we no longer feel guilty before God of our sin,  
    when we no longer care how He thinks of us, or how we have betrayed Him,  
    then what good is justification?  
    What good is the Gospel?  
    What good is a clear conscience,  
        when our conscience doesn’t even care?

What passes for good news today isn’t that your slate is clear before God,  
    that your sins are forgiven and that you’re free from divine judgment—  
    but that if you follow these simple steps you’ll avoid getting *caught*.

And in this sort of world, where God is distant and abstract, what good is the Church?

What can we offer here?

More pointedly yet, how is God good for this world?

And who cares whether He is 3, or 1, or whatever you make Him out to be?

*As long as I don't get caught, I'll do what I want and believe what I want.  
And don't try to tell me otherwise.*

To get our answers and to see how our Lord changes our sinful hearts and minds,  
we must start with Nicodemus in today's Gospel reading.

He's a picture of us.

He has no anxiety over his guilt—

in fact, he thinks fairly highly of himself, just as we do.

He's the teacher of Israel, a Pharisee, and a good one.

He's a member of the Sanhedrin and quite wealthy.

This Nicodemus came to Jesus *by night*—

that is, under cover, secretly, deceptively, and fearfully—  
making sure he wouldn't *get caught*.

And what Nicodemus wants to know, is whether Jesus will do him any good.

That's our question today, too.

Is this Jesus any good?

And the second is like it: How do you know?

Jesus says to Nicodemus, and to all of us:

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God”** (Jn 3:3).

In that one verse, Jesus speaks of both His goodness and how we are to receive it.

But what's it mean?

Is Jesus offering a method for entering the kingdom of God?

Is this an instruction for the thing Nicodemus lacks?

Is this a step, a procedure, something I can accomplish?

It all centers on those two little words: *born again*.

The Greek here for ‘again,’ is *anōthen*, which means both *from above*, and *again*.

For instance, the temple curtain is torn, *anōthen*, from above (Mk 15:38).

Or even later on in this same chapter of John's Gospel, He says:

**“He who comes *anōthen*, from above, is above all”** (Jn 3:31).

So which is it?

How are we to be born—*from above*, or *again*?

Nicodemus assumes a second birth:

**“How can a man be born when he is old?  
Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb?”** (Jn 3:4).

We’re just as confused.

For when we approach Jesus we want to know what we can do, how to get to heaven—

“Give us the steps, the check-list, and I’ll be on my way.”

And so we think we must somehow go and get born *again*.

Now in today’s context, *born again* often means a Christian who’s made a decision for Christ—  
someone that accepted Christ into his life, and now lives differently than before.

But that sort of *born again* misses what Jesus has to give.

The sort of birth Jesus describes is not a birth you can do, or accept, or decide upon—  
in fact, no birth works that way!

But Nicodemus doesn’t get it.

And more often than not, neither do we.

For like Nicodemus, we can’t help but to put ourselves at the center, to be a part of the process—

“What can *I* do?”

“Give me something practical, not theological—  
not *from above*, but from below, from me.”

So in a world, where we’re not in anguish over our guilt, and where it’s all about me—  
avoiding pain and suffering, temporary embarrassment, and most of all, getting caught—  
again, what good is God?

And what good is this Kingdom if there aren’t any practical steps that I can follow to get there?

Now you may wonder what any of this has to do with the Trinity—

it is, afterall, the Feast Day of the Holy Trinity!

Fair enough.

Most simply, the Kingdom of God *is* life within the Holy Trinity.

The Kingdom of God is that mutual love and adoration,  
that unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, just as we’ll confess in the Athanasian Creed.

The Kingdom of God is that life where none is before or after another;

none is greater or less than another.

Where together God and Man are coeternal, coequal, the way we were created to be.

And in this Kingdom there’s no fear, no anxiety, no guilt, no anger.

In this Kingdom there’s no selfishness, no cheating, no getting caught, no sin.

In this Kingdom, in this *Holy Trinity*, there’s pure love alone—

love that seeks and cares for and desires the other.

And that self-less love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is what makes the Kingdom so good.

But what about me? How do we get in? How is it good for me?

Now you'd think that a God who manages to be 3-in-1 and 1-in-3 would have some elaborate process by which you enter His Kingdom.

Or maybe this Trinity, equally eternal, majestic, and divine, would be unapproachable, distant.

And now we're ready again for Nicodemus's encounter with Christ.

What Jesus says is that if you want to see the very goodness of God,  
if you want to enter His kingdom, His Trinitarian life,

then it must come to you from the outside, apart from yourself, as a gift:

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit”** (Jn 3:5-6).

Lowly Water and the Holy Spirit come together in Holy Baptism;  
and that is what it means to be *born from above* and *again*.

So, if you want to see and enter the Kingdom of God,  
if you'd like to take part in this Trinity in unity,  
then quit trying to find your own way!

Quit looking for steps or methods or check lists of things to do.

Give up on yourself—you won't make it.

The only way to heaven, to see and behold and enter this Kingdom of God,  
is for it to come to you as a gift.

And that gift is the work of the Holy Trinity.

Each person with His own specific task and authority, and each working *for you*.

And more important than wrapping your minds around the intricacies of this Holy Trinity,  
is hearing how this Trinity comes to you—  
and believing that it's as simple as Baptism.

**“Unless one is born of water and Spirit”** (Jn 3:5).

We can only begin to know God by being born *from above* by water and Spirit—Holy Baptism!

God the Holy Spirit comes to us in Baptism.

There He tells us of Jesus, God the Son, and continues to do so all our life.

As we behold Christ, God the Son, we see in Him the image of the Father.

We see the Father's love and mercy, His kindness and compassion.

And there, in Christ, by the work of the Spirit, we're drawn into the Father, into the Trinity.

This is the Kingdom of God, this is heaven:  
life together with God, in God.

And this Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has such love for you,  
that He does whatever it takes to draw you into His life.

And with you, Nicodemus as well.

He doesn't force you, but He constantly calls.  
He calls you to see your sin and hate it.  
And though you're guilty, to confess it.

And then He shows you Christ—  
Christ who stood in the judgment for you  
who died your death, suffered your punishment, and took your sorrow on Himself.

Christ shows you the Father's heart—  
His love and desire for you.

And so He invites you in—into His life, His joy, His Kingdom.

And that invitation comes as simply as Water sprinkled on your head, along with the Spirit—  
*born again, from above.*

Nothing fancy, but utterly mysterious, sacramental, and true.

And best of all, you're included.  
That's how God and His Kingdom are good for you.

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