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Prov 8:1-4, 22-31

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

The rubber really hits the road in your theology when you start talking about the Trinity.
It's here, perhaps more clearly than elsewhere, that we realize just how heretical we can be,
even without trying!

There are two ways to talk about the Trinity:
to confess what it is;
and to confess what it isn't.

First a word of warning—once you think you've got the Trinity figured out, you probably don't.

The Trinity is a mystery—
it's who God is in Himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
(Now, mysteries aren't secrets—it's not *hidden* who God is.
But a mystery is the sort of thing that the deeper you go, the more you realize there is!
You can't check mysteries off your list!)

And like most things with God, when you push one truth too far, you end up in error.
With the Trinity in particular, we confess a unity, diversity, and equality in God.
When any one of these is left aside, you've got a particular brand of heresy.

For example, if we forget about the diversity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
we very quickly end up confessing *Modalism*—
a heresy that goes back to a man named Sabellius in the 3rd century,
who believed that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are 3 expressions, or *modes* of the
same God—appearing at one time as Father, another as Son, and another as Spirit.
Or if we forget the unity in God,
then we end up confessing Tri-Theism, or the belief in 3 Gods.
And if we leave out the equality of God,
then we end up in *Arianism*—
where we say that only God the Father is *really* God—
the Son and the Spirit are creations of Him.

We should certainly guard ourselves against each of these heresies.

But when we try teaching the Trinity to kids, that's where we're most heretical!
Because with kids, we try to solve the mystery—
we try to simplify who God is so that they can “get it.”

To do this, we typically use analogies.
Unfortunately, every Trinitarian analogy I've heard ends up in one of the heresies above.

For instance, *God is like water: Liquid at first; when heated, steam; and when frozen, ice.*

This is just *Modalism*.

Here we confess the equality of each state the water is in;
and we confess the unity—all three are clearly water;
but there's no diversity in their nature—it's the same water at 3 different times or *modes*.

That is actually *not* what God is like.

Another analogy is to say that *God is like an apple: there's the core, the fruit, and the peel*.

(You can also use an egg for this. And trust me, I've used this one before, too! I repent!)

Unfortunately, this is just *Tri-Theism*.

While the apple is one, each of the parts has a completely separate nature from the other.

Let's do one more: *God is like the sun: there's the star, and from it come both light and heat*.

This one is clearly *Arianism*.

While heat and light are certainly natural to the sun, they are *creations* of the sun,
and so they are subordinate to the sun.

I've also heard recently of 3-in-1 shampoo: *Tri-Theism*;

or a man who's at the same time father, son, and husband: *Modalism*;

or the ever popular-Three-leaf clover: which is a form of *Tri-Theism* again—

each leaf is one part of the clover, each leaf having its own nature.

So what do we do now?

Now that all the good analogies are shown to be different heresies—

how do we talk about the Trinity?

Or better yet, *what is God like?*

This is the amazing thing about Trinity Sunday—

did you notice the readings?

They're all about Jesus!

First came Proverbs 8, which is one of the most important texts in the 4th century.

Proverbs 8 was used by both sides of the Trinitarian Controversy.

Why?

Because it's all about Jesus!

Jesus is the Wisdom of God.

So when Proverbs 8 says,

"The Lord possessed Me at the beginning of His work" (Prov 8:22),

That's Jesus speaking.

St. Paul says the same in his letter to the Corinthians:

"Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24).

St. Athanasius, whose name is given to the Creed we'll confess today, used Proverbs 8 to confess Jesus as God.

Before the Second Person of the Trinity took flesh of the Virgin Mary, He appeared and spoke throughout the OT.

You'll find that He is the Word that brought creation into being. (Gen 1:1-3)
 You'll find Him visiting Abraham and Sarah under the Oaks of Mamre. (Gen 18:1)
 You'll find Him safely guiding Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego out of the fiery furnace. (Daniel 3:25)
 And you'll find Him interceding for Joshua the High Priest (Zechariah 3:1-7).

And in Proverbs, He is Wisdom.

Wisdom was there before the foundations of the earth.

*"When there were no depths...
 when there were no springs...
 before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills...
 before the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world—
 Wisdom was there!"* (Prov 8:24-26)

And then in the Epistle today we hear St. Peter preaching again about this Jesus:

*"For David Himself says,
 'The Lord said to my Lord,
 Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'
 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain
 that God has made Him both Lord and Christ,
 this Jesus whom you crucified."* (Acts 2:34-36)

And finally, in our Gospel, Jesus Himself says,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM!" (John 8:58)

So if you want to know what God is like—
 look at Jesus.

For Jesus is *very God of very God*.

Or as we'll confess in the Athanasian Creed:

*"He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages;
 and He is man, born from the substance of His mother in this age:
 perfect God and perfect man."* (Athanasian Creed, 29-30)

We can't know what God is like as Trinity, because we're not Trinity—
 and nothing in this world is Trinity.

God is totally other, completely different than anything He has created.

And yet, this same God became Man in Jesus.

He took on *our* flesh, *our* reason, and *our* words.

If we want to know what God is like, then we must look to Jesus, who is God *for us*.

And when we look to Jesus, we see that God loves us.

All that He did, all that He is, all that He desires, is *for us!*

This heavenly, holy, Blessed Trinity—
 three Divine Persons, one Divine Essence—Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity—
 this mystery of God has decided *not* to stand far off or be distant from you.

As St. Paul says to the Colossians,
 “*In Jesus, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.*” (Col 2:9)

And Christ has come to you!
 He has clothed you with Himself in holy Baptism.
 He has fed you with His own body and His precious blood.
 He has spoken His word to you, cleansed you, sanctified you, and made you His own.

You are in Christ.
 The Father is *your* Father.
 The Spirit is *your* Spirit.
 The Trinity is your God.
 And you are His people.

That’s why we’re here:
 receiving His gifts of love and mercy and grace,
 and worshiping Him who alone is worthy of praise and thanks.

So, next time someone asks you what God is *like*,
 don’t give them any analogies;
 just tell ‘em about Jesus—then they’ll have the Trinity.
In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit