

Dear Saints in Christ,

June 5 is Pentecost, and June 12 is Trinity Sunday. Pentecost, the celebration of the sending of the Holy Spirit, comes first because there is no way in heaven that we could understand anything about the Trinity if we did not have the Holy Spirit.

On Trinity Sunday, we confess the Athanasian Creed. We only say it once a year due to its length (it's not that long; you'll be fine; get over it). It's a magnificent statement on our trinitarian theology. It was not written by Athanasius (that would almost be too easy, now, wouldn't it?), but it reflects the faith that he staunchly fought for. It most likely arose in France during the 5th Century and became popular during the time of Charlemagne (you know, your favorite Charlie. Your second favorite Charlie is the chocolate factory one. Your third favorite Charlie is up to you.).

One main reason why Creeds are written is to battle heresies. It strengthens our faith when we do battle; it forces us to be extremely clear about the faith when we're refuting what it's not. The clearer, the better (this applies to statements of faith and lakes).

So in honor of creeds, I'd like to have this be a heretical newsletter. I mean I'd like to name some important heresies and tell you about them; hopefully the newsletter itself isn't heretical (so far, the only potential heresy is the amount of parentheticals. But the parentheses are important. They allow me to be snippy and to deflect blame; if anyone has a problem with the content in the parentheses, I will simply say that what I said was parenthetical, and so I cannot be charged with heresy. Okay, moving on...). I hope this is fruitful for you - I not only want to teach you what we don't believe, but I want you to know better what you do believe.

The first heresy to name is Arianism, named after Arius. Arianism is the prominent heresy condemned in the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. Arius taught that there was a time when the Son of God did not exist, and that the Father created Him; therefore, the Arians said that Jesus was like God but was not fully God. This is why we confess that the Son is, "Begotten, not made" and that He is "of one substance with the Father." Legend has it that St. Nicolaus (yes, that Saint Nic) slapped Arius at the Council of Nicea for teaching this hot garbage. It's for this reason that I fully endorse Santa Claus.

Second, let's talk about gnosticism, which comes from the Greek word "gnosis" which means knowledge. Gnostics teach that physical matter is bad; therefore, the body is bad, too. They taught that salvation was found in having this secret knowledge, which allowed the good soul to leave the bad body. Some gnostic writings describe Jesus' soul leaving His body before He was crucified; they taught that it was only a shell that was crucified. But the Scriptures clearly teach that matter is good because God created it. Jesus redeemed the material world by becoming a

material person. Weird things happen when you get away from physical matter. Many of our current day battles deal with this heresy; it's a gnostic thing to teach that your body does not matter in who you are as a person.

Third, let's talk about Nestorianism. Nestorius taught that Jesus has 2 natures (divine and human), which is correct, but his teaching is heretical in how those natures interact with each other. Perhaps Nestorius' teaching on Christ's natures is best illustrated by gluing 2 boards together; they touch, but they don't really interact. Nestorius refused to call Mary the mother of God; he taught that Mary was the mother of Jesus' human nature only. But Jesus assumed a human nature; God actually became man and is a man. The 2 natures communicate their attributes to one another. And so it is correct to say that Mary is the mother of God. It is correct to say that God died on the cross.

Fourth, and finally, let's talk about unitarianism. This is a heresy directly opposed to the Trinity. Unitarians only believe in 1 person as opposed to 3. There actually is a "church" called the Unitarian Universalists. They believe that whatever you call god, it's the same thing, and that everyone, no matter what, goes to heaven (that's where the universalist part comes from). Islam also presents a unitary god, Allah, and Mormons are also unitarians.

Now maybe this is a little dense for a newsletter article, but I want you to at least be familiar with the terms. I also want you to realize that Christianity isn't something new or unintelligent. It's the world's oldest religion; God has always been Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even before time began. Christians are the world's smartest people, and that's only by the grace of God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Stop by my office sometime. I'd love to have a heretical conversation (what I mean by that is... oh hopefully you get the idea).

In Christ,  
Pastor