

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost

Nicodemus heard holy Words, Words beyond man's understanding. He sat at the feet of a Man, a Man who opened heaven with His Words. He spoke of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, as did the Prophets of old. But when He spoke of God the Father and God the Spirit He used the pronoun "we". "We speak of what we know, and testify of what We have seen..." He is One with the Father and the Spirit, yet He is a Man. No wonder Nicodemus asks "How can these things be?"

So the Lord rebukes him: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" The Lord spoke to Him plainly about Baptismal rebirth. But Nicodemus could not understand. The same Lord that taught him was Himself baptized. He was Baptized in the Jordan waters. And when He had come up out of the waters, the Father spoke audibly, and the Spirit descended upon Him and remained. There too, standing before John the Baptizer, was the Holy We of whom the Lord spoke.

But John and Nicodemus are not alone. Isaiah saw the same Triune God, the Seraphim testifying to each of the Three Persons with the Trinitarian witness "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts!" Each of the Three Persons are Holy, and yet "...the whole world is full of His Glory." He is Three, He is One. So at the first Trinitarian Council the same Triune God said "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." The Three in One God expressed His one will in creating man.

But that man would not long be holy. The image of the Holy Trinity would soon be marred in His creature. The perfection of the man declared to be very good would soon be lost. So Isaiah, even when seeing God's Glory, lamented "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the Lord of Hosts." God is Holy. He is thrice Holy. But man is fallen. You are fallen. So how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

For you too have been a man of unclean lips. And you too have come from a people of unclean lips. You are the offspring of the man whose holiness was ruined, and that ruined nature is the stuff of which you are made. Although God Himself knit you together in your mother's womb; although you, like Isaiah and John and Nicodemus and Adam are the work of a Holy God; still your flesh bears the sin of your first father, and that sin has been expressed in the sins you have committed. The uncleanness of your lips is a but symptom of the uncleanness of your heart.

The Seraph held the cure for Isaiah's sinfulness. The altar before the Triune God yielded up its coal. The Seraph took it with tongs, and touched the Prophet's mouth with it. That piece of holiness brought holiness to the Prophet. The Seraph declared "behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is purged." Only holiness can overcome sin. And in His mercy, God forgave Isaiah.

The same Triune God has forgiven you. He did it not with a coal from the altar before God, but by God Himself taking on Flesh. The Second Person of the Thrice Holy God, the God in Whose image the first man was made, humbled Himself to be born in your likeness and image, yet without sin. He was made Man among a people of unclean lips. And while the holy angels once

covered their faces in His presence, while the angels burst forth in heavenly chorus at His Holy Incarnation, while angels ministered to Him when He overcame the desert temptation, fallen men rebuked and reviled Him. He who gave the first man life allowed Himself to be put to death. Not a holy ember born by a sinless messenger, but Roman spikes and a spearpoint touched Him.

But in that death is more forgiveness than in the Seraph's coal. For while that angelic messenger brought forgiveness to Isaiah, the God whom the Seraphim worship suffered and died to bring salvation to all men – not with tongs but with a cross.

While the Holy Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity is a great Mystery, even greater is the fact that God died. He died for you. He was placed in a stone tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and, yes, by Nicodemus, who brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, and wrapped the Body of Christ with the spices and linen strips, and placed it in the grave. Nicodemus was Israel's teacher, but could not understand these things. It appeared to him to be the end.

But these are heavenly things. St. Paul, who saw the risen Christ, explains: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! " And in His Divine way, in a way that no man could have imagined, God the Son rose from the dead. His Way is the Way of Blood-bought forgiveness. His Way is the Way of life.

And that you live, that the life He won be yours, that the forgiveness He won be yours, according to the will of God the Father you receive the benefits of God the Son through the work of God the Spirit. You are born from above in the rebirth Nicodemus could not understand. You are born of Water and Spirit in the font, where the Triune Name is scribed upon you, your old man drowned, and your new man brought forth.

And born again in Christ, you see the Kingdom of God. For the Kingdom of God comes upon you when God gives you the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son.

That Spirit works faith in you, faith that clings to Christ, and you are reconciled to the Father by the Son through the Spirit. And then the God of the Seraphim touches your lips – not with a coal, but with His Body and Blood, as you eat and drink Christ. And like the Prophet, your iniquity is taken away, your sin is purged. For you have heard heavenly things, and you have believed.

So it is yours this day to worship the God who created you, the God who redeemed you, the God who sanctifies you, one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence.

For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.

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