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The Feast of Holy Trinity, June 19th, 2011

✠ **In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.** ✠

One of the most heart-warming things about being a clergyman today is that almost everybody you meet is completely familiar with your main stock in trade – the Bible. It often seems that people assume they know it at least as well as you do; probably better in fact – especially if they've never actually bothered to read it.

The most dogmatic of amateur Bible scholars tend to be atheists, most of whom claim to be entirely familiar with the Holy Scripture, although when pushed many are somewhat vague about the bits they've read: In any event they never seem to be the bits you happen to be discussing with them.

An example of this phenomenon cropped up during a recent conversation with a professed atheist about the church feast we are observing today: The Holy Trinity. "Where did this idea about the Holy Trinity come from?" he asked, "How come there's no mention of the Trinity in the Bible?"

"Oh, but there is," I replied. "The Trinity is there in the first three verses of Genesis: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. (*That's God the Father.*) And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the

face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (*That's the Holy Spirit.*) And God said, Let there be light. (*That's God the Son.* That's why we call him the Logos, the Word.)

"Oh, come on!" replied my atheist friend, "You can't believe Moses knew all that!" "True," I replied. "But God did. "I wasn't trying to be clever. That is the nature of divine revelation. God often tells us things we don't fully understand until very much later.

We meet all three persons of Holy Trinity individually on several occasions in the Old Testament, and not just the Book of Genesis. We encounter God the Son most graphically in the Book of Daniel and, of course, the hundreds messianic prophecies. The Holy Spirit crops up in the Psalms and Isaiah, for example. God the Father is there all over the place. And most spectacular of all, the three Persons of Holy Trinity paid a joint visit to Abraham and Sarah when they were camped under the Terebinth Trees at Mamre.

Naturally, my atheist wasn't satisfied with this. While he conceded the Old Testament was littered with hints of a Holy Trinity, he wanted an explicit

statement to that effect. The trouble is, however, that human beings learn very slowly – at best a process of two steps forward and one step back. We don't seem to be able to cope with a lot of information all at once. It means God had to concentrate on the essentials.

It is not particularly important for us to know the Godhead is composed of three divine persons sharing one divine nature. The important thing is that there is only one God and he expects to be obeyed. The Old Testament is a chronicle of our failure to learn that lesson. Imagine how much worse things would have been if we'd had to digest the three-in-one business as well!

Aaron, for example, created the Golden Calf only days after being told not to do it. The great prophet Samuel didn't understand it wasn't his place to be offended when the children of Israel demanded a king. Their Covenant in the wilderness made God their king: Samuel was simply his servant.

The greatest prophet of the all, John the Baptist, got hold of the wrong end of the stick and rarely let go. As an unborn baby, John easily recognized the Messiah. Luke says he leapt with joy in the womb when the newly expectant Virgin Mary visited John's mother, Elizabeth, shortly after the annunciation.

But as a grown man he didn't recognize Jesus as the Messiah until God told him so at the Jordan River. Even after hearing God's views on the subject, he still had doubts. Shortly before his execution, he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus: "Are you the Messiah or should we look for someone else?"

Jesus answered by quoting the messianic prophecies in the Scriptures: "Go tell John once again what you have seen and heard" he told them, "The blind receive their sight; the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear, the dead are

raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

John had been preparing for 30 years for his job as the "Forerunner" of the Messiah. He was familiar with all of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. But when the chips were down he ignored God and instead put his faith in unfounded human theories about the Messiah. If the greatest prophet of all got it wrong, what chance do ordinary human beings like us stand?

First, we should stop pondering what makes God tick and start taking him at his word. When he says he is a Trinitarian being, we should accept what he says and get on with our lives rather than reject the idea as nuts or try to figure out how it is possible to share one's nature with three other people.

The one thing you can say for about the Trinity is that it explains why God is perfect love: The only way for three persons to share one nature is to be perfectly loving. Anything less than perfection would mean constant friction.

If the history of philosophy teaches us one thing it is that, for human beings, the urge to delve into the mind of God is virtually irresistible. But when all's said and done, it is a fruitless quest. There's no way our tiny finite minds can comprehend that infinite and eternal intellect.

That is why Jesus tells us the only way to show love our for this vast, all-powerful and ineffable God is to love the frail and all-too-fallible creatures he created. Love, you see, is one of the very few divine attributes we can begin to get our minds around and experience. *AMEN.*

***To the Only Wise God, Our
Saviour, be Glory and Majesty,
Dominion and Power, Both Now and
Forever. AMEN.***