

Seeing the Divine Forest in the Humble Trees

There's an old adage that speaks of not being able to see the forest for the trees. You know... you're looking for a big, beautiful forest; e.g., the Great Redwood Forest—something like what you see on TV or social media; like what you imagine a big, beautiful forest to be—and when you finally get there, it's not at all what you expected it to be. It's not at all what you imagined to be; what you've built it up in your mind to be. You finally get there, and all you see is... trees. ***Where's the forest?!*** This little saying hits at a very real problem that affects ***all of us*** from time to time. We've all had our ***grandiose visions and epic expectations***, and it doesn't matter if we're talking about people, places, or things. We have our expectations. Unfortunately, though, when we come face to face with the ***reality*** of that certain person, a place, or thing, we look around and wonder if there's some kind of mistake. **This can't be it!** ***Oh... it is.*** You've just missed the forest for the trees. Stupid trees.

The reason I lead off in such a way is because as we turn our attention to the Gospel lesson for this morning, we catch a glimpse of the Pharisees ***missing the holy and divine forest for the lowly and unassuming tree that was standing before them.*** As you well-know, these guys had their expectations of what the holy Christ of Almighty God—the Messiah—was supposed to look like, sound like, and act like, ***and Jesus met none of those expectations; not even close.*** They had their expectations for the glorious divine/Messianic forest, and they couldn't see that forest because when they looked at Jesus, all they saw was a little loser, Charlie Brown-type tree. More specifically, they didn't ***want*** to see the forest God was revealing to them because they didn't like the tree. What a bunch of jerks, right!? Well... I wouldn't be too quick to condemn them. I'm not saying that they're not wrong! Like I said before, though, missing the forest for the trees is something ***we're all guilty of doing from time to time.***

This is why I love the fact that this lesson is appointed specifically for Holy Trinity Sunday. Whenever Holy Trinity Sunday comes around, the focus tends to get put on the “omni” attributes of our God and Lord; i.e., God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omni-present (all-present/everywhere). This makes perfect sense, and I'm not knocking it one bit. How often we forget the fact that God—***and God alone***—possesses these omni attributes. You look around at the sinful world we call home; all the problems and trials and tribulations, all the ways in which it seems like evil is winning, and it's very easy to forget the fact that God ***is*** almighty and all-powerful. He's all-wise and all-knowing. He isn't absent or aloof or asleep at the wheel, ***but really and truly present, even in the midst of the dark and shadowy valleys of despair we find ourselves in, working all things for the good of those who love Him.*** We need to

be reminded of these blessed Gospel realities, and Holy Trinity Sunday is the perfect time to do so.

Now... is there/was there ever a time when Jesus *wasn't* fully God? Of course not! God Himself tell us, *"In Him [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily"* (Col 2:9). *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:1, 14). ***Jesus is, always has been, and always will be God, which means Jesus is, always has been, and always will be omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent.***

So... why is this important for us to remember/consider? Answer: Because the Pharisaical problem of missing the divine forest for the trees is ***nothing new***. In fact, it's a sinful problem that affects all of us from time to time... especially those times in our lives when we're looking for and expecting "more."

Example: How often have you not felt forgiven? How often have you struggled with guilt over your sin, ***doubting God's forgiveness for you because you're trusting your heart more than His Word?*** Look to this lowly tree that is the cross of Christ. Look to the omniscience of God—the wisdom of God—made flesh and nailed to this cursed tree so that you can have the gift of life! Look to the omnipotence of God as He makes full and complete atonement for each and every one of your sins. *"It is finished!"* Only God Himself can make such a statement and it be true, and His resurrection from the dead three days later ***proved*** it was true. Death no longer has dominion over Him. Now look to your baptism; the pathetic little Charlie Brown tree that is ordinary water. ***Talk about the omnipotence and omniscience of God?! Do you not know that all of us who've been baptized have been baptized into this—His death and resurrection? His victory over sin, death, and the grave is your victory over sin, death, and the grave!***

Of course, there's the other side of this too. How often have you not stressed over your sinfulness, ***as if it's not really a big deal?*** *"Everyone else is doing it. So what?" "There are people who are WAY worse than me!" I'll do what I want, and I'll just ask for forgiveness later."* Again, I direct your eyes to the wretched tree that is the cross of Christ. Here is the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God... ***dying for your sin. Don't act like your sin is no big deal!*** Your sin is such a big deal to God that He took on flesh and laid down His own life because of it! Your sin is so great that ***only the death of God Himself can make atonement for it!***

I wonder... how different would our daily lives look/sound if we could actually behold His cruciform wounds before we opened our mouths or scratched our selfish, sinful itches? How different would our lives look/sound if we could behold the divine forest?

Where is Jesus? Way up in heaven, out of sight, out of mind? No! Where His Word is rightly taught and His sacraments rightly administered, there is Jesus. “*Where two or three gather in My Name....*” “*As often as you do this, remember what I have said. This is My body/blood.*” **Here is the fullness of the deity of God...** and yet how often do we miss it or forsake it because *it’s not glorious enough?* It’s not what we want/expect?

Look in the mirror. How different would your worship life be if you could actually see Jesus in all His resurrected glory, standing here each and every time two or three gather in His name, preaching the sermon, absolving you of your sins, baptizing babies, and giving you Holy Communion? Would you ever blow off being in the presence of Jesus? Would your priorities change a little? ***Would you maybe move your schedule around a little bit in order to spend an hour with Jesus in His house?*** How different would you treat others if you could see your Lord standing right there with you/them? Would those sinful words not come spilling out? Would the gossip dry up because Jesus was present? But... don’t you already confess that Jesus is God, and therefore omnipresent? ***So... why would your life look/sound any different?***

How different would your prayer life be if you could see Jesus sitting directly across from you, listening intently to your every word and concern? Would you pray more? Would you talk to Him more? How different would your devotional life be if you could see Jesus Himself sitting right there with you, ***speaking directly to you every time you opened your Bible?*** Would your Bible get a lot more use than it does right now? If you could physically behold your Lord Christ in all His glory and grace, would the other things in your life that are so important ***suddenly become less important?*** **I would hope so!** These are the words of our Lord... in the red letters, even. And yet... how often are they treated as mere words. As long as they remain mere words in a book; mere words just read aloud by some schlep like me... ***we miss the forest for the trees.***

What about when some kind of tragedy hits in your life? What about when you find yourself suffering, struggling to keep your head above water in the midst of a dark and storm-tossed sea? “*Lord, save me! Deliver me! Do something!*” **He is.** ***“I am with you always, to the end of the age.” “I will never leave or forsake you.”*** “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.*” ***You do believe this, right?*** Those aren’t just mere words, are they?

Folks: Your Lord is right where He promises to be, doing exactly what He promises to do—giving His peace; a peace that the world cannot give; a peace that surpasses all human understanding. ***Here is the fullness of deity, dwelling with us in our midst!*** Here is the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent triune God! Here is where heaven is being brought to earth; where eternity is meeting with temporality. And yet... how often we look right past it. How often we reject it.

There are times we even get angry and despise it. The heavens don't rend. The omnipotence of the Almighty doesn't burst forth like the sun. The voice of the Almighty Himself doesn't rattle the foundations of heaven. The forest is missed because of the lowly trees God uses to work His miracle of faith and life.

Folks: Like it or not, the glory of God will remain hidden/veiled in His Church until He comes again on the Last Day in all His visible glory. ***Look around. This is how the Almighty and Triune God, in all His wisdom, chooses to abide with us and work our salvation—His humble and hidden-in-plain-sight means of grace.*** Either you get it or you don't. *“Whoever is of God hears the words of God.”* The reason why so many do not hear is because they are not of God. That's not my opinion or a resolution voted on by a majority of men. That's not my judgment or condemnation. That's the Word of your Lord. Those who have ears to hear, hear Him. Those who don't, don't.

May the Almighty and Triune God, who blesses us even now by really and truly dwelling with us in grace; may He continue, through the working of His Holy Spirit in these, His means of grace, to bless you with His gift of saving faith so that you will never miss the ***divine forest for the gracious abundance of holy trees that He's already planted in your midst.*** And as you prepare to disperse into this great big world of ours, may He also grant you the open mouth that naturally comes with this saving faith—the open mouth that ***can't help*** but bear good and faithful fruit by proclaiming the Good News of Christ Jesus crucified and resurrected for all mankind. May His tree of life be your focus, your glory, your joy; may it be the reason for all that you say and do, now and into all eternity.

AMEN