

Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 6, 2026 jj
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✠ sdg ✠

You have just finished a delicious meal. The food was amazing. The dining room was exquisite. The service staff attended to your every request and did everything to ensure your experience was the best possible. You're about to pay the bill and walk out the door, when suddenly the chef bursts out and catches up to you. "Would you like a tour of the kitchen?"

It's not exactly what you had in mind. Sure, the creator of your dinner entrees ought to be proud of his work. He's even entitled to share a bit of his excitement about mastering the craft of cooking. Would it make any difference in how you tasted the flavors and savored the textures? Probably not, but nevertheless a tour through the kitchen might enhance your appreciation for all that has to go into making a great restaurant possible.

So you follow the very eager chef who has now become your tour guide as he pushes open the swinging door into a whole different world. The bright lights make you blink for a second. The calm, relaxing background music of the dining room is jarringly replaced with clanking pots and crashing dishes. Hushed conversations about pleasant topics at the tables give way to shouting back and forth about cold chicken or missing garnish. An expeditor is sticking her thermometer into the prime rib to get the reading at 165, or was it 125? She's the one who has to know! Flames are leaping upward from the burners and the griddle is sizzling hot with clouds of steam rising from the vegetables nearing tasty perfection.

You find out that a single table's order has to be prepared in exactly the perfect order or else the food would turn out ruined before it reaches the table. The plate will have to be scraped over the trash can instead of presented on a charger with fine linen and silver. The cook will just have to start over.

You witness the dizzying list of ingredients and steps that made your dish the masterpiece that you can still remember tasting with every luscious bite. Yet it all looks different in here than it did when you first saw it. It's the same food. The only thing different about it is that you're seeing all the background for it, like the difference between the reverse side and the front of a tapestry. Same artistic mastery, just a different perspective on it.

That could be one way of explaining what's going on when we confess the Church's common faith using the words of the Athanasian Creed. Its wordiness doesn't imply that the other, shorter two Creeds are missing anything. Instead, the *Quicunque* (That's the first word in the Latin version, meaning "Whoever...") this forty-verse Symbol invites you for a brief tour of the kitchen if you will. It ventures into topics that weren't necessarily explicit when you were taught the faith at first. But complex as they might seem, they are doctrines based on God's true and inerrant Word nonetheless, and cannot be left out. No true theology is man-made babbling. It all must come from the plain words of the Bible. Difficult topics like, The sharing of attributes of a singular Godhead, but the continued distinction of persons in the Trinity, the non-reciprocity of

the *majestic* genus, the unified Person of Christ with two distinct natures, that was all going on in the kitchen as you were enjoying the delicious dish that assured you of the simple truth that Jesus is perfectly one with God, but He's also perfectly one with you. And becoming the Savior of sinners did not lessen Jesus' majesty as the Son of God, instead it demonstrated His glory through the suffering of the Cross, a suffering that could only be accomplished by having the same human body we have, except without our inherited sin. We are fully reconciled to God the Father, not by some mysterious waving of a magic wand, but by a real suffering and death that paid the huge price, leading to a real resurrection and ascension that sealed the deal. And all of it is handed to you thanks to a Divine Word proclaimed to you.

This access to Jesus and experiencing the suffering of His Cross—it may not sound like your idea of an enjoyable dinner, right? Yet reconciliation with God the Father required it. If we deny forgiveness to our family and fellow Christians, we'll begin to deny Jesus has accomplished that reconciliation for us too. We are told to become like little children, that is, acknowledge our total dependence upon Jesus rather than asserting our own way, if we are to inherit the kingdom that Our Divine and Human Savior came to establish in our midst. Prey on that total dependence and lead a believer away from Jesus? Well, consider that your one-way ticket to a sea cruise, complete with a millstone necktie. There is a reason to be particular and persistent about teaching pure doctrine and worshiping with pure liturgy and hymns.

The fact remains- No blessing of God is possible for us without the due punishment

being endured first. Jesus came to endure that punishment in His true human body on the Cross. He came to suffer and die that you might live. He rose from the dead in victory, just so He could give that victory to you and also to your dearly departed loved ones, and even merciful, undeserved forgiveness for those who have hurt you along the way. Through His very real human body, He delivers blessing and sets the example of our suffering and mercy to others as He calls us to follow in His footsteps. The extreme maiming of your body to keep yourself from sinning is no longer necessary, since Jesus gave up His entire body for your sake, and breathes in you His Holy Spirit to strengthen you in the face of all temptation.

Now that you've had your brief tour of the kitchen with the Athanasian Creed, you know that the suffering and trials that you must face in your life will not go unfruitful. You are instead taking your place in those high mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Two Natures of Christ, even though you have heard it expressed in different words while you were enjoying them out in the dining room. Although all the specialized theology might at times go right over your heads, you know someone serving you who has to know and get it right. At times, your ordained server may get a little excited about the theology and sound a little nerdy while discussing it, but you know the end result is the good, nutritious, life-edifying spiritual food that your Lord wants you to have. Anything false and unbiblical must be scraped off the plate and left in the trash can. It cannot be served to our guests.

As you exit the kitchen and re-enter your more everyday interaction with the Bible's teachings, you encounter Saint Paul's

directions in these last chapters of Romans and other places with a new appreciation. I, humbly speaking on behalf of the Chef, think we need to hear and ponder the Athanasian Creed more, given the fact that it is the only one of the three Creeds of Christendom that explicitly mentions the necessity of good works. We are heirs of God's kingdom, yet we are still called to obey the earthly governing authorities He instituted, even while we urge them to do their duty and respect Divine law together with sound common sense. We pay our taxes and allow our rulers to bear the sword in earthly righteousness, all the while we love our neighbor in fulfillment of the law that Jesus perfectly kept, and suffered, in our place. As today's Creed concludes, we know we have true faith in Christ when that faith He has placed in you through your Baptism has done what is good rather than your corrupted human nature doing what is evil. His works are what you will present before the great judgment throne as He bids you enter the fullness of the new life you have living within you even now.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The feast Jesus serves continues on. His good nutrition of forgiveness and strengthening are worth savoring every moment you spend at the table with Him. A little time in the kitchen might broaden your perspective and increase your appreciation for this heavenly food that you're tasting here today. It could give you the dose of humility you need to reach out to the brother you know you need to win over, rather than win against. On the final day, you too will see the Son of Man come in the clouds in the Father's glory, ready to welcome you with open arms of forgiveness to His magnificent, fully prepared feast!