

MAY 28, 2017

ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

JOHN 17: 1-13

“SOMEBODY IS TALKING ABOUT YOU”

If a person whispers in your ear, “Somebody is talking about you!”, you probably won’t be happy to hear that news. Your first reaction may be to think that someone is gossiping about you, saying some bad stuff. That’s not an unrealistic way to respond because gossip is such a common problem, such a common sin. I’ve preached lots of sermons about it---but not today.

But if someone is talking about you, it’s not necessarily gossip. Somebody could be saying nice things about you, or expressing concern for you.....

The part of the Gospel of St. John from which today’s gospel lesson is derived talks about a particular situation of someone talking about us. And it’s a very good thing! Perhaps even a surprise....we will look at who is talking about you in just a couple of minutes.....

Today’s assigned gospel reading, John 17: 1-13, is part of a very long section of the Gospel of St. John. The whole section is read together as one gospel reading in one service, not today----it is the first of the 12 gospel readings on Holy Thursday evening. That is the longest gospel lesson of the year----the priest or deacon just keeps turning page after page..... It’s so long that sometimes you have to have “sub” altar boys ready to replace the little fellows standing holding the candles. They get worn out!

In this section of the gospel of John, there is quite a bit about the Holy Trinity. The Trinity is the greatest mystery of all existence. It is the essential mystery, the most essential fact of life. And our belief in the Holy Trinity makes Christianity unique. Sometimes people will say things like, “All the religions of the world are really pretty similar.” Well, not so similar in reality. Only Christians believe in the Trinity and that makes our Faith unique. No one else believes in the Trinity.

To put in very, very basic terms-----what we believe is that there is one God who consists of three Persons---the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All 3 Persons have always existed. They are co-equal and co-worthy of worship. All 3 are God. God is one and God is three. God is three and God is one.

We, and especially we Orthodox, hear about the Trinity a lot---most of our prayers, many of our hymns, etc. We hear about it so much that there is a danger, that in being so familiar with the belief, we could take this ultimate reality for granted. But when Jesus Christ came to the world 2000 years and revealed the truth of the Trinity (as we sing at Theophany over and over again---in Christ’s coming, the “worship of the Trinity was made manifest.”), it was quite a shocker to the world. In fact, that shock was a big factor in why He was crucified.

The most important fact in all of existence is that there is one God who consists of three united divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We can't even begin to understand what that all means! But God has let us know a little...

One thing we know from the Bible----that the three Persons of the Godhead interact and communicate with each other. An example is when our Lord Jesus Christ was baptized in the Jordan River as we celebrate on January 6. The Son is baptized as the Father sends down the Holy Spirit. And at the Ascension which we celebrated just 3 days back, the Son ascends to the Father in order to soon send down the Spirit upon the Church. The three, in these 2 examples, work together in perfect harmony.

And they "talk" to each other. (I put talk in quotes because our human words are totally inadequate to describe things about God. God's "talking" is not much like our human talking---it's too far above us for us to understand at all. But I will use the term "talk", putting it in quotes to show it's certainly inadequate to describe divine communication.) So we don't know what their "talking" is about, but we do know they communicate with each other----all the time. The New Testament is full of many, many examples of this. There is lots of communication going on among the three Persons of the Godhead.

What do the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "talk" about? The 17th chapter of the gospel of St. John, part of which is today's gospel lesson, tells us that the three Persons "talk" about you and me! Perhaps there are other topics in this divine communication. God does have a whole universe to uphold and keep going. But God seems to have set it up all pretty well and I don't think the Persons of God have to have communication about how well is gravity doing lately or how are things in the various galaxies.

If you look at the various places in the Bible where the divine Persons communicate with each other, it seems they are usually "talking" about the same subject----us! Remember the phrase I used at the start of the sermon---"Somebody is talking about you!" Who is "talking" about you? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Here's how we know this.....John 17 is the chapter from which today's assigned gospel lesson is taken. In that long prayer, Jesus does a lot of praying for His 12 Disciples. But then a few verses after the end of today's assigned reading, the Lord goes on in verse 20 to say these words---"I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word." That means He is praying for *us*! For we Christians are the ones, 2000 years later, who believe in Christ because of the words of the Apostles. So it us, as well as the 12 Disciples, that our Lord Jesus Christ is praying for in John 17.

And He never stops praying for us! We know this from what St. Paul wrote in Hebrews 7:25-----"He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He *always* lives to make intercessions for them." Always---that's when Jesus makes intercessions for us, prays for us. "Always" is when God the Son "talks" to His Father about us.

Maybe sometimes you think and feel you are unimportant, that no one really cares about you. Maybe when you're having a bad time, a hard time---whether for weeks, or even years, or maybe even just a bad, bad day.....you start to feel alone and not cared for. Wrong! Even when you're feeling all alone and down and out, Jesus Christ is praying for you to the Father. He is praying for you right now. We know because Paul said in Hebrews that He *always* prays for you. Some one is "talking" about you every day----the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

As true believers in the Holy Trinity, we would love to know more about how all this works. How do the Persons of the Godhead communicate? But we can't know as it's way too far above our little minds. And even if we could hear the divine communication, we would never understand it anyway. Even if our ears could take it in, our brains could not figure it out!

You've heard of "church mice". They exist! We had some little four-legged visitors in our vestry this past winter. As far as we can tell they never came into the altar area. And we never actually saw them, but they left some souvenirs behind. Subdeacon Richard took some "severe disciplinary actions" to "persuade" them to leave and they haven't come back. But imagine a church mouse, holed up somewhere in the vestry, just across the wall from the sanctuary. It's Sunday morning and that mouse can clearly hear the entire liturgy--the profound prayers, the beautiful poetry of the hymns, the words of consecration of the Holy Gifts. The mouse hears every word, but understands not one thing. Its ears work well, but its brain just isn't set up to understand what we do here. It would be similar for us if we could somehow hear the divine communication between the Persons of the Trinity. We would have no idea what it all meant. It is *way* above us.

But we do know one thing the Divine Persons communicate about---you and me. We believe this because the Bible tells us so in John 17 and Hebrews 7 as we have seen. We know that Christ is always praying to the Father for us.

What amazing love God has for you! God is concerned about you and your problems and your salvation. Amazing love! Your name keeps popping up when the Son prays to the Father!

So don't ever think you don't matter much. You matter a lot! Right this minute, the Persons of the All-Holy Trinity, the Persons of God, are "talking" about you! You are that important.

And this leads to the very simple direction to be given in this sermon---If God loves you that much, thank Him! He loves you a lot, so thank Him a lot, all the time.....

In France there are many, many cemeteries for all the soldiers killed in World War I. Thousands and thousands and thousands of young men are buried in them. And in the cemeteries there are soldiers buried whose bodies could never be identified. No one knows who they are---the Unknown Soldiers. In some places there are grave markers for these unknown men. No name can be given, of course, but the gravestones read—"An Unknown Soldier---Known to God" (in "Our Daily Bread", 5/30/01)

You, also, are known to God. And known very well!. After all, the Three Persons of God "talk" about you all the time! You are known, you are not forgotten. And you are always being prayed for by Jesus Christ Himself.

So thank God every day for His love for you. How wonderful that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "talking" about you---and that the Son is always praying for you. Give thanks to God!