Today is Trinity Sunday and I have to say that when it comes to explaining the nature of the Trinity, I am really fresh out of ideas. This is my fourteenth year of doing it quite frankly I’m spent. So, if you would like a quick summary of the mysteries of what the Trinity you can open in your prayer book to page 864 and read The Creed of Saint Athanasius. The text itself is brilliant but not very exciting. For a few highlights it reads, “We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. 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 co-eternal.” So, there’s a better explanation of the Trinity than I can make. And so let’s talk about something else and that something else is the history of Trinity Sunday and the effect the Trinity can have on our spiritual lives.

If we can trust Wikipedia, Trinity Sunday came onto the scene under Pope John XXII who poped from 1316 to 1334. If you want a little trivia about him (and who doesn’t), he was one of the Avignon popes. The Avignon popes were the popes who from the years 1309 through 1376 moved papal headquarters from Rome to Avignon in France because they were tired of the shoddy, mafia run sanitation collection on Vatican Hill or something like that. I could not find any reason for why Pope John XXII decided to make a commemoration of the Trinity on this day but my guess is because it is the day on the church calendar where all the ingredients have been introduced – God the Father and God the Son have kind of been around since Christmas and then last Sunday on Pentecost God the Holy Spirit came along. And that is all fine and good but neither Pope John XXII introducing it nor my theory on why Trinity Sunday happens today gets us any closer to explaining why it is important to remember the Trinity. So let me get into that.

There are, of course, many reasons to remember the Trinity but today let’s just look at two (even though I should probably remember three because it is Trinity Sunday after all). But here are the two things I want to point out: First Trinity Sunday reminds us that God is relational in and of himself and, second, today reminds us that while God is God there are different persons of God in which to be in relationship. So let’s go into a little more detail starting with the relational nature of God.

If God is, as we say, one God and three persons this means that within the oneness there is a three-person relationship. Or put another way, part and parcel of God’s nature is a relationship – the three in one and one in three as St. Patrick tells us. God is always in relationship and if He was not, He would cease to be God. And since we were created in the image of God this means that we are created to be in relationship. But since we are not God, we do not have the ability to be in relationship by ourselves and so we must actively engage with others who are also created in God’s image (i.e., other humans). Since all of you are actually at church today, you do not necessarily need to hear this message, because you are doing what it is that I am talking about, but I have to tell someone, so you are stuck. So here is my point: many people today claim that they have faith but will, in so many words, tell you that this faith does not require them to do things like go to church. But if, as I just said, God is relational and we were made in the image of God then we cannot ignore this component. Church is the place where we are not just in relationship with God but also with each other. And the relationships that we have in church is different than other relationships because they are caught up in the relational nature of God. Yes, certainly, we can worship God all by ourselves, but that is not all there is to it. We must also worship God in community, because God in his very nature is in community. And while that sounds well and good because we are human there is something that can be very hard about this and that is in how we define community. Here is an example of what I mean by that. My wonderful wife was recently at a diocesan event and the subject of the reunification of the three dioceses in Wisconsin came up. For those of you not familiar with this there is a discussion amongst the Dioceses of Eau Claire, Fon du Lac and Milwaukee to form one super diocese that would one day rule the galaxy or maybe that was what Darth Vader promised Luke Skywalker if they joined together. This reunification discussion even has a cutesy name; it is called the trialogue. I assume if there were ten dioceses, we would be having a decalogue, but back to my point. Amy was at this event and one of the participants told her that she was against this proposed reunification. Which is not inherently wrong, but what was wrong was the reason why she was against it. And that reason was that to her way of thinking the people who live in those places that were not contained within the confines of the Diocese of Milwaukee were redneck mouth-breathers who would simply not be cultured enough to understand the urbane sophistication that is southern Wisconsin. I mean some of those people might even have a deer stand and not know who Steve Inskeep is. But here is the problem with such thinking: if God is community in and of himself, we do not get to make judgements like this. If we are called to be in community with one another we have to figure out how to, well…. be in community with one another. Saying that some Christians are not worthy of our community is not a viable option.

The second thing that I want to talk about is the fact that there are three persons. Which seems a rather obvious point, I mean we are talking about the Trinity. But what I think we can forget is that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all God. In practicality what this means is that when we pray, we are able to pray to any person of the Trinity. The three persons of the Trinity are different, otherwise there would not be three persons of the Trinity. I don’t know if this is a great analogy but it can be like growing up and having things that you would rather talk to mom about and things you would rather talk to dad about. I won’t go into all of the detail about who might be best to talk to, but let me make a quick plug for the most forgotten person of the Trinity when it comes to prayer, The Holy Spirit. When Jesus describes the Holy Spirit he says, “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” As explained by Jesus the Holy Spirit is the part of God that is very present to us while on this earth. Meaning that in many ways as we navigate this life it might, actually be best to pray to the Holy Spirit. I don’t know how many of you do this but I would offer this little challenge. This week when you sit down to say your prayers try praying to the person of the Trinity that you most rarely pray to and see what happens.

Today reminds us that, “we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.” And as obscure as this might sound it has real consequences for our lives and makes it so that we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.