

***“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.”***

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

What is God? That is the question that heathen king Hiero asked the famous philosopher Simonides. “Give me a day’s time and I shall tell you”, was the quick reply. When the king called on Simonides the next day for an answer, the philosopher said: “Give me two days more, and I shall give you an answer”. Again, after two days, the king summoned Simonides, who begged forgiveness, but said he was not ready and needed four days. The philosopher continued to postpone giving an answer. Finally, impatient with the delays, the king demanded an answer at once. Then Simonides exclaimed: “God, oh how unfathomable He is! The more I think of him, the less I understand him.”

You may be like Simonides, overwhelmed with the whole understanding of God. Don’t feel bad. St. Paul said: ***“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”*** (Romans 11:33, ESV) But while we may not be able to comprehend the vastness of God in this world, we can rejoice that the one, true God has made Himself known to us. We know the true God, because He has revealed Himself to us in the words of Holy Scripture. We know the true God, because He came and lived among us, as the Eternal Son is born in human flesh to share our earthly existence and live our human life, that He may redeem our lives for His glory. We know the true God, because the Holy Spirit dwells within us, to make Himself known to us.

Like the people of Israel, we need to ***lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.*** But that is not the reality that we see in this world today, is it? In our multicultural society, we are confronted with the fact that the people of our world have many gods, each of them worshipped in a particular way. Yet in the minds of many all these so called ‘gods’ are just different ways of speaking of the same being or idea, as if it’s just that you say tomāto, I say tomāto.

What’s your God like? In his book, *Fragmented Gods*, sociologist Reginald Bibby begins: “It’s an old but critical question: ‘Did the gods create us, or did we create the gods?’ It has been asked through the ages by theologians, philosophers, social scientists, and of course, reflective ordinary people.” (Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, p.1) Bibby also notes that the reason the question of “who created whom” has been raised in the past is that people frequently worshipped gods that strikingly resemble their own personal and cultural characteristics. Psychologists will point out that people tend to emphasize the supernatural features in deity that most reflect their own needs: if they are weak, then God is all powerful; if they are friendless, then God is a companion; if they need guidance, God is all knowing.

In many ways, the views that people have of God keep changing to match their personal views—and their own comfort level. We all know the first commandment—at least, we should. Moses speaks that commandment to the people of Israel: ***“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God”***. (Deuteronomy 5:6-9, ESV) But people do make their own gods, don’t they? During their captivity in Egypt, the people of Israel would have seen the idols of Isis, the cow-headed Egyptian goddess of fertility, or Ra, god of the sun. The Philistines had Dagon, the god of the grain. You can’t watch a super-hero movie like Thor and not know about Odin, the God of war and wisdom and Loki, the god of mischief and trouble. Zeus, Apollo, Ares, and a whole host of others can be named from culture to culture, from age to age. The evangelists who went out into the world had to confront these gods. Paul preaches at the Areopagus in Athens and says: ***“Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”*** (Acts 17:22-23, ESV) And Paul has to remind the people in Corinth: ***“we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.””*** (1 Corinthians 8:4, ESV)

Of course, we don't see that as being a problem for us. We don't make graven images. We don't worship the sun or the moon as God. We don't have a pantheon of gods, each with a different characteristic or function. But, on this Trinity Sunday, when we contemplate the great and wonderful nature of the One, True God, we still need to confront ourselves with that question, "what's your God like?"

I am often told by people that they believe in God. But the God they believe in is very different from the God of the Bible. Many people see God as a god of love. They think of God not so much as our father in heaven, but as our grandfather in heaven. Grandfathers are often more understanding, tolerant and permissive than fathers, who have rules and discipline and authority. In this line of reasoning, God doesn't seem to care if we are obedient to the commandments, because He loves us and understands that we are just children. He tolerates our challenges to His revealed truth, because He knows we are growing and changing and need to experience different things. The grandfather god doesn't worry about people worshipping or praying or even believing. His grandchildren get to meet him on their own terms. They get to do what they want and live as they want, because their lifestyle doesn't matter to this manifestation of God.

Others see God as an angry judge, just waiting to punish us for everything we do. God has rules and rules and rules. He only likes us when we obey the rules. The only way we can come to Him is through our obedience to these rules. And when we break the rules, God is angry with us, until we make up for what we have done.

Still others see God far too much like ourselves, with the same feelings, emotions, and inconsistencies of character. Their God is wise, but He is not all knowing. Their God is strong, but not all powerful. Sometimes God is indifferent and distant; other times He is patient and understanding. It all depends on the day and how they feel God feels.

People want a god who will let them do whatever their sinful hearts desire to do, and so they make God into their image. But God isn't what we make Him; God is as God always was and always will be. He isn't like the gods of the world with their lusts and anger and selfishness. None of those gods are real; they are, in fact, the making of mere human beings. But, as Moses says: ***"For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."***

Know this and take it to heart: there is only one God. He is not the god that so many people worship; the god who is created in the image of man. He is not the god of multiculturalism, where each different expression still refers to the same deity. He is not the things we often put in the place of God; nor is He the god whom we envision in our own minds. He is the God who has revealed Himself to us in the words of Holy Scripture. We listen to the words of Isaiah today, and we see the True God, who is holy and powerful, wise and wondrous, the God in whose presence we need to say ***"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"*** (Isaiah 6:5, ESV) But we know God has not abandoned us in our sinfulness; rather, He has done all that is necessary for our salvation. We heard those wonderful gospel words today: ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*** (John 3:16, ESV) We do not believe in a god who is powerless to help, but a God who has come to the rescue of His people, as Jesus dies and rises for us. We do not believe in a permissive God, who turns a blind eye to sin, but in a God who, in His justice, has worked to set us free from sin and its consequences through the sacrifice of His Son. We do not believe in a distant God, but in a God who comes to make His dwelling among us as Christ lived with us. We believe in a God who is near to us, for Jesus promised He would never leave us or forsake us. This God comes to us as Jesus gives that very body and blood given for us on the cross in the sacrament of Holy Communion. We believe in a God who invites us to come to Him in prayer, and who works all things together for the good of His children. And this God calls us through the Gospel, so that we may know Him and His love. He calls us as His own in our Baptism. He calls us through His Word to a life under His gracious rule. As His Spirit works in our hearts, we know Him; we trust Him; we love Him. In that love and faith we serve Him, obey Him and honour Him. And we find the fulness of life as we live in Him, for He alone is God. And how great our joy to know that He is also our Lord, our God. Amen.