We always say the Athanasian Creed once a year, today on Trinity Sunday, but the Athanasian Creed is the creed that always causes the most questions. What does this mean, exactly? Why does it say this? Is this true? And so forth. And while we focused on one of the things that it says last year, this year we want to focus on something different. Specifically, line 26, which says: "Therefore, whoever desires to be saved must think thus about the Trinity." Now, that seems like a pretty strong statement, if you think about it. Why is it so important for us to have who God is right? Why is it so important for us to know who God actually is? And on top of that, the word "trinity" is never found in the Bible. You could look through all the pages in this book, and you won't find it anywhere. So why is it so important, then? Why do we as Christians insist on the Trinity when you can't find the word in this book?

Christians, it's important because it is critical for us to know who God actually is. If we have a wrong idea about God, then we simply don't know him, no matter what we say, even if we claim to know him. Let me use an analogy so that you understand what I mean. If there was someone who claimed to know you very, very well--they say they've been your friend for years, they know all about you--but then as they kept talking, they got a whole bunch of things totally wrong about you. And not just small things either. Let's say they got your name wrong, or they said that you were a man when you're in fact a woman or a woman when you're a man. It'd be very obvious, then, that they had no idea who you are, even if they claim to know you very well. And so, in the same way, Christians, if we say something wrong about who God is, we don't know him, even if we claim to. And not knowing God as he is has eternal consequences.

But why then do we insist on the word "trinity," especially when it's not found in the Bible? Because the word "trinity" shows the truth of what the Bible actually says. "Trinity" is literally a compound word made up of two different parts: "tri-," meaning three, and "unity," meaning oneness. So it's literally a tri-unity, a three-oneness, God in three persons and yet only one God. That's why we use the word "trinity." And we can see the truth of this word by comparing what it is that the Bible says about God.

So for example, the Bible is absolutely clear that there is only one God. Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 4 says: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." So there is only one God, and apart from him there is no other god. Deuteronomy 4 also says: "To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him." So there is only one God. And God is not one god among many, the way that the pagans sometimes think. All the other so-called gods simply do not exist. And God is not actually three gods, like we say in the creed. There is only one whom we worship. There is only one whom we adore. Only one God who is the Creator. Only one God who upholds all things. Only one who is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega. Only one who is the Lord God Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come! The Bible is perfectly clear about this: there is only one God.

But the Bible is also perfectly clear that this one God exists in three Persons. And we can see this in a passage such as our Gospel reading for today. Verse 19 says: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." So there are clearly three there: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And yet these three are one God. Because Jesus does not say: "in the names," plural, "of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Jesus does not say: "in the name of the Father and in the name of the Son and in the

name of the Holy Spirit." Jesus says: "In the name," the one, singular name, "of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Three persons in one God, a tri-unity, as we see clearly here in the Bible. And so, if we compare what it is that the Bible actually says, we can see the truth that the word "trinity" is showing us.

And it's important to know all of these things, Christians, because our salvation depends on it. Some people might say, for example, that it ultimately doesn't really matter what we believe, because it's all the same God after all, right? We don't need to worry about it because there's one God in heaven, and that's all we really need to pay attention to. But in reality, Christians, how do we know that that's true? How do I know that what I mean when I talk about God is the same as what you mean when you talk about God, if all we use is the word "god"? If we don't say anything else beyond that? Because maybe, for example, by "god" I mean a generic creator who's over all things, a kind of higher power who rules over the world and who takes care of us, but we can't really know who he is. But the problem with that is, that's not the God of the Bible. Or maybe by "god" I mean nature, everything around us, so that God is in everything and God is everything. But that's not the God of the Bible either. Or maybe I talk about God, but I never get around to talking about Jesus. That's not the God of the Bible.

And if I have the wrong God, I cannot be saved. the Bible is perfectly clear about this. Jesus says in John chapter 14: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus does not say that "I am one way to the Father," as if there's a whole bunch of different ways that we might come to know God. Jesus does not say "I am a truth," as if he was one truth among many. Jesus does not even say that "you can come to the Father through me," as if he's just one option. No, Jesus says: "No one comes to the Father except through me." There is only one way to heaven, and knowing God in Jesus Christ is that one way. If we don't know who God is, then we cannot be saved! It is critical to know him and to know who he has revealed himself to be.

But we don't come to this knowledge on our own, Christians. If we know who God is, it's not because we've memorized a few facts about him, so that we have everything straight in our heads. If we know who God is, it is because he has revealed himself to us. We hear in Matthew chapter 16: "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'" And so Peter rightly understands who God is, even if he never mentions the Holy Spirit here, because when he says that Jesus is the "Son of the living God," he knows the right God. He rightly understands who God is and who he has revealed himself to be. But Jesus says that he only knows this because the Father has revealed it to him. Peter didn't study these things to figure it out on his own. The Father revealed this truth so that he would be saved. Peter is blessed and Peter is saved by the grace of God alone. And if we know the truth, Christians, then we have been brought to know it by that same grace, the grace that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ, his Son, and revealed to us in the Holy Spirit. And knowing that, we too will be saved. That's why it's so important to know who God is.

So Christians, what we say about God is important. It's important to know the right God. And we know the right God because he has shown himself to us. And knowing him by faith through the grace that he has shown to us in Jesus Christ, we can call on him and be saved. This is why the Athanasian Creed says what it says. It is important to think thus about the Trinity, because it is

when we know God as he is that we will come to be saved and to enter into the glories of paradise.

Let us pray. Holy are you, O Lord, and holy is your name. We give you thanks that you have revealed yourself to us in your Son, Jesus Christ, so that we may be saved. To you be all glory and honor and thanksgiving and praise, for you are the most holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.