

### Trinity 3, 2018

*“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith...” 1*

Peter 5, 8-9

“Steadfast in the faith” is not a commonly heard phrase but it is a critical one: the faith-the Catholic Faith, to give it its proper title-is a precious, living inheritance. It is handed on from generation to generation of the Church and takes as its starting point....well, we could discuss what it takes as its starting point. For today I suggest that the fountainhead, the source of the river, is the starkly simple and beautiful statement that Jesus is Lord. Think of the unequivocal words from St Paul in Chapter 10 of the Letter to the Romans: *“if you confess with your lips that **Jesus is Lord** and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Romans 10.9 From this very simple statement comes all that makes up the Catholic Christian Faith because it begs three questions: who is **Jesus**? Of what is he **Lord**? And the use of the word **“is”** rather than **“was”**? It may seem obvious to us, but to others the use of the present tense has a strange ring to it that requires explanation.

This treasure of the Catholic Faith is something that the humble Prayer Book of 1662 enjoins us to consider and maintain with the greatest seriousness: it says, at the beginning of the oft overlooked *Athanasian Creed*, that *“Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholick Faith. (capital C and capital F) Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.”* It then goes on to define the “Catholick Faith”. The text is to be found immediately after Evening Prayer. Its main work is to set out in unequivocal detail the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ-*“Perfect God and Perfect Man”* as it states.

It is in standing firm in this Catholick Faith that we are called to resist steadfast the wiles and temptations of the devil, our adversary. And of course the oldest trick in his book is to seduce us, often through the teaching of theologians, into believing that **some** elements of the Faith are dispensable. This happens today just as it has happened in each generation of the Church. And of course the Faith is not like the good old ‘pick n mix’ section of Woolworths, of blessed memory, regardless of what they tell us. The Virgin birth and the bodily resurrection matter as much today, in a full and literal sense, as ever they have done.

The second oldest trick is to convince us that a contemporary, worldly demand must be satisfied and that in doing so we are not really compromising our principles of faith. The Church and the World have been held in tension since time began and of course the difficulty for us is working out which battles we must fight and which are of secondary importance. How do the many and perplexing modern dilemmas map onto this “Catholick Faith”? Medical science, through the sheer advances in knowledge and skill, confronts us with fresh and unimagined challenges. Unborn children have never before been in such a confusing and contradictory place in the public consciences. And then there is the pace of global communication through the internet and through many other means that is unsettling for us: how does this relate to the statement *“Jesus is Lord”*? Is he the Lord of the internet too? And of social media?

We won’t find all the answers in our own lifetime and we will have to take a fair amount on trust-but it’s a wonderful trust because it is the trust that wiser and holier minds and hearts than ours have pondered and prayed these questions before us and kept the Faith. A number of them are here on the pulpit, to remind you and me and all other preachers here that the Faith preached in this place is the faith that was known by these great doctors of the early Church and that they would recognize what we are doing and saying and believing as being nothing other than the *Catholick Faith*, handed down to us as a treasure, a priceless treasure. It is entrusted to us to do likewise.

What if you can’t manage the ‘whole nine yards’ of the Athanasian Creed? DO NOT DESPAIR! Think of it as a jigsaw puzzle: you have all of the pieces entrusted to you in the box, you have the picture on the cover and, by God’s grace, you will complete as much of the puzzle as He needs you to complete. As for the rest: he might just be calling you to live with some of those questions. It is a creative place to be, and a faithful one too. It is not a sign of failure-far from it. It is a sign that God is calling you to step out humbly (as we are reminded to do in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> lessons today) and to step out in trust, believing that, wherever we find ourselves, whatever the muddle or confusion of our lives, at the heart of the *Athanasian Creed*, at the heart of the *Catholick Faith*, is the God who loves us and knows us and who will search for us to find us and bring us home, just like the Good Shepherd in the Gospel text today. Amen to that.