In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let me begin with that golden verse from this morning’s Gospel Lesson, John 3:16:

16For 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, RSV)

This is a mighty and loving God indeed, that he should give his only Son for you, for me, for the world! I hope that we will be encouraged and strengthened in our Christian life by enjoying what the Doctrine of the Trinity has to say about our God.

This Sunday is Holy Trinity Sunday. Here is my theme: My friends, you are loved by three divine Persons. Whatever life brings you, think to yourself, “I am that important! Three divine Persons are on my side, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” These three constitute a sacred society if ever there were one! Never has there been a society like unto this Society! Never has there been a collaboration and a dedication so strong and so good as this Team. These three - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - constitute one sacred Society, one divine Collaboration, one pure Team, one God. I am speaking of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three Persons are great! And each of these three loves you. Whatever life brings you, these three are on your side. They are on your side in different ways, but coordinated and dedicated ways. Life is much better than it might look, for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit “have your back,” as the modern phrase goes. You are not fighting to be good alone. You are never lonesome as you try to do some good in this world, for the Holy Trinity is with you every step of the way. They have time enough for that, you are so precious to them!

Let us begin to discuss our triune God by considering the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. I hope that by the end of this sermon we will think to ourselves, “Man! I do not want to oppose the Holy Spirit in my life. I do not want to grieve the Holy Spirit!”

The particular ministry of the Holy Spirit is to make us better people, to make us holy, to sanctify us.
There is a kind of stepladder of ministry toward us by the three divine Persons and perhaps it is not too much to say that the pinnacle of this divine ministry is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The first step belongs to God the Father. He creates us. He calls us into being. He gives us existence. And this work of God the Father is a good thing, for if he did not create us, then we would never have been born and our story never would have been told. But your life is precious to our God and your story is a good story, and my story is a good story, and they are worth being told. Our triune God believes so!

God the Father, then, brings us into being. He is unwilling that this world should not have us. He says “Let there be...” Now fill in your own name. “Let there be Gregory!” And so it is. So I am. So you are!

But now we come to a magnificent line in the Easter Proclamation from the Easter Vigil. Rev. Kelly-Ray Meritt chanted it for us with his beautiful baritone this past Holy Saturday, back on March 31. In our darkened church, the ancient line went this way:

This is the night in which, breaking the chains of death, Christ arises from hell in triumph. For it would have profited us nothing to be born had we not also been redeemed. Oh, how wonderful the condescension of your lovingkindness! Oh, how inestimable the goodness of your love, that to redeem a slave you delivered up your Son!

Notice that calculus concerning our souls:

For it would have profited us nothing to be born had we not also been redeemed.

This makes sense, doesn’t it? How could it have been good to be created, if we were then destroyed? And we were born into a fallen world in which sin, death, and the devil mean to destroy us. They sure do! But the Second Person of the Holy Trinity saved us. He redeemed us, not with silver and gold, but with his own precious body and blood. So, that is our salvation.

But now we come to another haunting question: How could it have profited us to be born, and to be saved, if we must go through all eternity unprepared and out-of-harmony with heaven? How can it help us to live forever in Christ’s kingdom if we have not been living for Christ? Heaven is meant for holy people. And here we come to the ministry of the Holy Spirit—a kind of pinnacle of our humanity: The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to make us better than we are. It is to make us holy. It is to sanctify us. As the Christmas carol puts it, “...and fit us for heaven to live with you there” (Away in a Manger).
Do you see what I mean when I said earlier that by the end of this sermon, I hope we will all say, “Man! I do not want to oppose the Holy Spirit in my life. I do not want to grieve the Holy Spirit!” It would have been to no avail to have been created if we had then been killed by Satan. But it also would have been to no avail to us to have been saved from Satan but then to wend our way through all eternity out of synch with heaven, or even to miss heaven entirely and end up in hell. It would not be good for us to be born and to be saved if we mean to go through eternity as sinners. The Holy Spirit does not want us to linger in sin. He wants us to make some progress. So in the years left to us, let us make some more progress. Let us renew the battle. The Holy Spirit reminds us of Jesus, he tugs on our hearts, he urges us on toward a more holy life. He will not settle that we should be such mediocre people. Neither we nor our neighbors need that. We were not made for mediocrity, but for good works, as the Bible says:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10, RSV)

For some of us, the Holy Spirit has been trying to make us holy for many years now — maybe 60 or 70 or a 100 years, till our hair is grey or white and our strength is declining. The Holy Spirit has worked with us, given us opportunities, supplied us with the Bible, given us churches and liturgies, given us good people of faith in our lives. At the Great Judgment, we will not be able to plead the neglect of the Holy Spirit. There has been, and God willing, there will be more times when the Holy Spirit has whispered to us, “Do the right thing. Follow Jesus. Walk in his ways. Trust yourself to him.”

Of the three divine persons of the holy Trinity, I imagine the Holy Spirit to be the divine Person who most looks on at us and grieves. The Holy Spirit is sorrowful for us. Throughout our lives, all the way until we are plopped down in the grave, the Holy Spirit is the very voice of God appealing to us. But do we heed that voice enough? Maybe the saints do, but do you and I heed that divine voice enough?

Think of Cain, for example. The Holy Spirit knows that the man is on the verge of murder. And so he makes his appeal, to try to save the man. The words go this way:

6The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? 7If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

(Genesis 4:6, RSV)
But Cain does not master it. He does not heed the voice of God in his life. The result is murder against his brother and misery for Cain who is now an outcast. Let us not do this! Let us not ignore the voice of God in our lives.

Listen to the longing in God that we should not die. Listen to the longing for life in this beautiful passage in Ezekiel chapter 18:

31 Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.” (Ezekiel 18:31-32, RSV)

The Holy Spirit has made this appeal many times, for example, to people figuring that they will give illegal opioids a try. They know the danger, but they are willing to set it aside. The Holy Spirit is appealing to them, “Why would you die? Turn and live!” But it is possible to harden the heart against the voice of God in our life. Let us not do that.

How many times have we heard that wonderful passage of Scripture in which Jesus invites us to come unto him?

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28, KJV)

And we have thought to ourselves, “Man! I do labor and I am heavy laden,” and yet we do not come to him. We turn Jesus down, again. And the Holy Spirit is sorrowful for us.

The Holy Spirit is the one who knocks on our doors. He does not knock the door down. He does not burst on through. But he sure makes his appeal to us:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20, RSV)

Listen! St. John says.

Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. (Revelation 3:22, NRSV)

Listen, and live! Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. And so, let us not resist and grieve the Holy Spirit, for that Spirit wants only our good, to fit us for heaven to live with our God forever, even the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.