

## “Use it or Lose it”

- Once upon a time, I knew math.
  - No, it’s true! Graduate Sunday has kind of made me nostalgic...
  - Math was one of my strong suits when I was your age, graduates
  - There was a time I knew algebra, trig, even went through Calculus 3
  - Want to know what I know now?
  - If you don’t use it, you lose it. Maybe especially math.
  - Now all I have is a TI-92 calculator for a souvenir
  - If you were to ask me to subtract small numbers today, I would not be able to do so without my iphone
  - You either keep using it, or it fades away
  - This is also true for a lot of things in life: physical muscles that will atrophy over time if unused
  - And I would venture to say that it is true for softer skills like compassion and empathy
  - And of course, there is faith.
  - If left unchallenged and unused with no prayer and no faith community, it too can turn into more of a souvenir rather than an active part of life
  - But more on that later
- We have quite a lot of ground to cover this morning - this is a very complex and exciting day
  - On one hand, from our liturgical calendar, today is Trinity Sunday, a celebration of mystery and the ultimate unknowability that is the divine
  - A paradox doctrine, if you will
  - The Sunday when ancient heresies often make a comeback
  - And on the other hand, we are celebrating learning and accomplishment with our seniors as they graduate
  - This pairing occurred to me earlier in the week
  - What an amazing combination: mystery and knowledge
  - Faith and learning
  - It is sad to me that these two things are often viewed as opposites
  - To bring home the point, just this past Friday, I sat down at Panera with a cup of coffee and began my sermon work

- I overheard another conversation nearby, and I quickly realized it was a preacher and a college student discussing faith
- They were talking pretty loudly, and even over my music and headphones I could still hear pieces
- The preacher was worried about another student, worried that they were growing distant from church activities
- They were discussing how best to reach out to this young man
- And the preacher was very worried because this young man was majoring in biology, and that, he said, is a hard path
- He was not talking about how hard biology classes are... He was talking about how hard biology classes are on faith.
- That somehow, taking biology, or I would guess just about any science or religion class at college
  - Could somehow threaten or destroy this young man's faith
  - And the preacher was worried
- I took a drink of my coffee and I sighed a big sigh of relief.
- And I prayed for this future Episcopalian taking biology classes! :)
- I was relieved as I thought about my sermon today, and mostly about our graduates
- Because I get to be the bearer of good news, some different news:
  - There is absolutely nothing in a college biology class, or math class, or psychology class, that will be a threat to your faith.
- So to our graduates this Sunday, I want to add to all of the well wishes you are receiving
  - We are proud of you, you have done well, you have finished high school
  - While in once sense it is the successful conclusion to an era,
  - I would encourage you to see it as the first step of a new one
  - Before you lay many paths and possibilities
  - Let me be one of the few preachers on Graduate Sunday to tell you, without reservation,
  - Learn as much as you can.
  - Take as many math and science classes as you can- humanities too
  - There is nothing to fear in the classroom.
  - You will not learn anything that God does not already know
  - Indeed the more you learn about God's creation the more you can learn about God, for the creator is reflected in the creation

- You know it was a Catholic priest who first developed the theory of the Big Bang, right? <sup>1</sup>
- I was inspired this week by all the commencement addresses on youtube
- I even listened to our President's address to the graduating class at Rutgers University<sup>2</sup>
- One of the best lines out of the whole thing: President Obama said,
  - "Ignorance is not a virtue."
  - And I would add that a blind, untested, un-thought-out faith isn't either.
  - Knowledge is not the enemy of faith,
  - Knowledge is not the opposite of mystery.
  - They all go hand in hand.
- Which brings me to the next topic for today, the Holy Trinity
  - I once heard that Trinity Sunday is the Sunday priests try and demonstrate they have a seminary degree
    - And everyone in the pews wishes they didn't.
  - No doctrine in the history of the church has been more confusing and has created more heresy
  - But it is important, and truthfully we need it.
  - We need to be reminded that God is not something we can own, not something we can even fully understand,
  - God is beyond and bigger than ourselves.
  - God as three in one, and one in three.
  - This doctrine of God is much more than just another way of looking at God, or understanding God
  - We have many examples of those in the Bible saying what God is like:
  - God is like a consuming fire, God is like silence, God is like a mother, a father, a shepherd, a judge, and like a forgiving creditor
  - Instead, the doctrine of the Trinity is actually descriptive of God's being
  - This is God as God has revealed God's self to us.
  - This is different from saying what God is like: this is saying what God is.
  - Built right into God's very self is relationship and diversity
  - A constant reminder for us that we too are in constant relationship with each other

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.physicsoftheuniverse.com/scientists\\_lemaitre.html](http://www.physicsoftheuniverse.com/scientists_lemaitre.html)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ9jJm\\_q5Jo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ9jJm_q5Jo)

- No one is an island until themselves- we are dependent upon each other for our survival and for our identity as people of faith
- Just like God is interdependent among the three persons
- Indeed, the more we know about quantum physics the more we see just how deeply and inextricably we are connected to each other and to the universe
- Just like God is to God's self
- Creation mirrors creator.
- Three persons, one God, forever in connection, conversation, and relationship
- Ultimately a mystery beyond our grasp: the finite minds of the created trying to understand the infinite existence of the creator
- A paradox, a mystery that will not be unraveled until the life to come
- And that is its power, its gift to us today among all days
- Knowledge and faith are like two strands that make up the double helix found in every DNA strand of our bodies
  - (I learned that in a college biology class)
- That even with all of the knowledge in the universe, God will remain bigger than our little boxes
- And never simply a projection of ourselves
- God will always be part mystery.
- We never have to be afraid of learning- learning will not destroy our faith
- Learning will only lead us into a deeper faith that appreciates just how big God really is.
- And a humility that knows some things cannot be fully comprehended.
- Knowledge is not the enemy, willful ignorance is not God's desire
  - Knowledge and faith are complimentary
  - The true enemies of faith, and of society I believe, are cynicism and apathy
  - Cynicism is so easy, so fun sometimes, but it usually tears down and harms relationships rather than building them up
  - It rarely make the world a better place
  - So to our graduates, and to all of you seekers here of all ages looking for a deeper faith
  - Do not fall into the trap
  - Do not give into cynicism or apathy- as our President said very well, "Apathy has consequences"

- And that is true both in our political world as well as our ecclesiastical world.
- As I said earlier, faith is a lot like math and muscle, if you don't exercise it, you will lose it
- So pursue all of the knowledge you can get
- And let it shape and deepen your faith
- And then let your faith move you to take all of that learning and head out into the world to change it for the better.
- Faith can stir and motivate knowledge.
- For our graduates and seekers, I hope one day you challenge all of us
- I will be frank- the world needs smart, educated, and faithful people who appreciate mystery
- And the church needs you too.
- I hope that one day I am the old, cranky priest who struggles to keep up with a changing church
- Because that means the church is still alive, and responding.
- That means that the Holy Spirit continues to push us to make the world a place of more justice and greater love
- Martin Luther King Jr said that "The arc of the moral universe long, but it bends towards justice."
- May God, the Father Son and Holy Spirit, lead all of us to take all of our knowledge and all of our faith and put it into action
- To transform this world into the very Kingdom of God.

Amen.