

The Fourth Sunday of Easter
(Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Acts 13:14, 43-52
<i>Response</i>	We are his people, the sheep of his flock.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5
<i>Second Reading</i>	Revelation 7:9, 14B-17
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	I am the good shepherd, says the Lord; I know my sheep, and mine know me.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 10:27-30

The Fourth Sunday of Easter for Year C continues our journey through, not the Gospel of Luke as you might expect, but the Gospel of John. And if you'll remember, as I pointed out earlier, John doesn't get its own year like Matthew, Mark and Luke. So the Church gives us readings from the Gospel of John throughout the liturgical year, most especially during the seasons of Lent, and above all the season of Easter. So that's why we're focusing so much on these sayings of Jesus from the Gospel of John. And the 4th Sunday of Easter is often referred to as "Good Shepherd Sunday", because every year on this Sunday we're going to take one of the teachings of Jesus from John 10, a very important chapter in which Jesus reveals his identity as the Good Shepherd (or through the analogy of a shepherd). And so in this year, for Year C, the Church's selection from John 10 is seemingly short (well it's actually short), and maybe seemingly insignificant, but don't let the brevity deceive you, because this is one of the most important texts in all of the gospels. It's Jesus' famous declaration, "I and the Father are one", this revelation of his divinity. So we're going to read the gospel, we'll try to unpack it and then we'll look at what the Acts of the Apostles has to say for us and how these were interpreted in the living tradition of the Church. So in John 10:27-30, this is the gospel for today:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,

and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."¹

End of Gospel. Okay, so what's going on here? Well it's important to remember that the overarching context of this very brief gospel selection is Jesus' Good Shepherd discourse. It's a long allegory in which Jesus compares himself to the shepherd and his disciples to the sheep, and he talks about how some people (or thieves) try to break into the flock and steal the sheep (all that). It's a long allegory; you're probably familiar with it from this same 4th Sunday in the Easter season. We always read some selection from it. And in this case though, the Church has focused us in on some of the final words of Jesus in his Good Shepherd discourse, that are taking place in Jerusalem, in the Temple. So that's the setting of the words that he's using here. And in this brief gospel, there are three key ideas that are revealed that we want to make sure that we focus on.

Number 1: the identity of Jesus' sheep. Notice what he says here about the sheep (which is a metaphor for his disciples). First, Jesus' sheep listen to him. They hear his voice. Now, on one level, he's alluding here to the fact that when shepherds lead their flocks, they would do so using their voice. And so, the shepherd makes certain calls to the sheep, and the sheep learn to know the shepherd's voice, and that's how they follow him when they're out in the fields. But of course, allegorically here, what Jesus is referring to is his disciples. So just like the sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd and listen to the voice of the shepherd, so too his disciples hear his voice and (it is implied) they obey what he says.

The second aspect of Jesus and the sheep is that he says, "I know them." Now, again, on one level, the allegory here is just point to the ordinary fact of life that because a shepherd spends day and night with his sheep, week after week, year after year, he gets to know the sheep. He does know them. He knows each one of them by name (sometimes the shepherds would name the sheep) and he recognizes who they are. So, on one level that's the meaning of his words. But allegorically here, he's also reflecting (and revealing) that as shepherd, he too knows each one of his disciples. He knows each of his followers intimately. He knows who they are. He has a relationship with them.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

And then finally, the third characteristic of the sheep is that they follow him. Now that doesn't just mean that they obey what he says (although that's definitely implied), it also means that they go where he goes. They walk where he walks. They follow the path that he leads them on. And you'll see this over and over again in Jewish literature. Although, like contemporary modern people, we tend to think of morality as a series of rules which you can either break or not break, and if you keep the rules you're in good moral standing and if you break the rules you're in bad moral standing, but the metaphor that was much more prevalent in both the Jewish scriptures and also writings at the time of Jesus for morality was not the image of a rule that's either broken or kept, but rather the image of the way of a path that a person would walk. And you'll see Jesus use this over and over again in the gospels. He'll talk about, "There are two ways. The way is wide and easy that leads to destruction and the way is narrow and difficult that leads to life." So the idea that morality isn't just a series of abstract propositions that we either keep or don't keep, but rather it's a path; it's a daily journey. You have to take step-by-step, you have to walk the path. And so here he's using that imagery with reference to sheep because what do sheep do? Well they move from pasture to pasture with their shepherd. And so the sheep of Jesus (his disciples) also are called to walk in the way that he walks, to follow him where he goes. And of course, ultimately, that's going to mean following him to the cross, to Calvary, to Golgotha.

Alright, so Jesus is making this analogy, using this allegory about himself as the shepherd, his disciples as the sheep, and then the second thing he talks about is not just the nature of his relationship with his sheep, but the gifts that he gives to his sheep. And he mentions three here that are really worth highlighting. First, he says, "I give them eternal life." Now pause there for a second. This clearly shows that this is an allegory, because although a shepherd is going to give life to his sheep by feeding them and caring for them, he doesn't give them eternal life. So the Greek word here, *zoe aionios*, means life everlasting. He's talking about the life of the age to come, supernatural life that never ends. So that's his gift to his sheep: eternal life. He's not just a good shepherd, he's the supernatural shepherd (so-to-speak). Second, he also gives them deliverance (or salvation) in the sense that he says, "They shall never perish." Now what does that mean? Well, it doesn't mean that Jesus' disciples aren't going to die (that is very important). You'll see Jesus talk about this over and over again in the Gospel of John. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him and he shall not perish." Well that doesn't mean that you're not going to experience natural death. All of Jesus' disciples experienced natural death. What it does mean is that they will never perish

eternally. They won't die the second death, as the book of Revelation calls it. They won't experience eternal death, which would be eternal separation from God that later goes on to be called the pains of hell.

So, he gives them eternal life, that's the positive expression; second, he gives them salvation in the sense that they will never die, they won't experience eternal death. And then third and finally, he gives them spiritual protection. This is something that I think that contemporary Christianity (at least in the west, in the secular west for sure), we don't tend to talk about Christianity in these terms, in terms of spiritual warfare, but the gospels are rife with spiritual warfare. Jesus sees all of human history as this dramatic battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. So when he says here, "No one shall snatch them out of my hand", of course he's alluding (on one level) to the fact that (to this day) people steal sheep from one another. You have farmers or shepherds who are near one another and one of them doesn't have good morals, they don't abide by the law of the commandments, then you might catch them stealing sheep from one another. And so, in this case, what he's saying is, "I'm the good shepherd, my disciples are like sheep, but unlike earthly sheep" (which can be snatched away and which can be stolen), "no one shall snatch them out of my hand". So Jesus is also the powerful shepherd who casts his spiritual cloak of protection (so-to-speak) over his sheep. He's going to guard his flock from intruders, from thieves who might try to steal his sheep. No one can snatch them out of my hand.

And he actually says this: "My father who has given them to me is greater than all, no one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand." So, here he makes a very clear leap to the Divine Shepherd, the heavenly Father, who is also shepherd of the sheep. In fact, all the sheep that Jesus shepherds belong ultimately to the Father as well. And so, the devil (Satan), is not able to snatch them out of Jesus' hand and he's not able to snatch them out of the Father's hand, because the Father is greater than all. This is an important corrective: You'll sometimes hear people talk about Satan and God as if they're two equal and opposing powers, like the yin and yang, or the light and the dark side of the force (or something like that in the Star Wars movies). But that's not the biblical conception, it's not the biblical worldview at all. God is completely and utterly omnipotent. He is more powerful than everyone and Satan is just a creature. And however powerful he is, he is nothing (literally, nothing) compared to the power of the Lord Almighty (as he's called in the Old Testament). So Jesus here is revealing his power to protect his sheep (spiritually) from the evil one (from the enemy).

Before I move on, let me make clear here what Jesus doesn't mean. It's very clear here that Jesus is talking about spiritual protection from the power of the devil (from the enemy). What he does not mean when he says "no one can snatch them out of my hand", is that it's impossible for disciples to fall away or to lose their salvation. And you'll actually see this later in the Gospel of John, in John 15, when he uses another analogy, the analogy of the vine and the branches. He talks about if a branch (that's part of him) doesn't bear fruit, then it's cut off and thrown into the fire, which is an image for hell, an image for eternal separation from God in the fires of Gehenna. So Jesus himself is really clear that his disciples can be cut off from him if they don't bear fruit. And for what it's worth, he's also clear (in John 17) that disciples can fall away of their own free will, and he uses Judas as the premiere example of this. Because in John 17:12, he actually says (about the disciples), "When I was with them I kept them in thy name which thou has given me. I have guarded them and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition that the scripture might be fulfilled." That's John 17:12. That's an explicit reference to Judas, who betrays the lord, who betrays Jesus and who falls away. So, what Jesus is talking about then in John 10 is his ability and his power to protect his disciples from the attacks of the enemy, not some kind of "once saved, always saved" doctrine where the disciples can't fall away, because he's very clear that if they don't bear fruit, they will be cut off and thrown into the fire, and Judas is exhibit A of a disciple who falls away from Jesus, and through his own power, his own choice, breaks away from the good shepherd and is lost. He's called the son of perdition.

Alright, so with that in mind then we'll go back to John 10, and ask about that final line. Once Jesus has asserted that the Father is more powerful than all (and in context there he's talking about that he's more powerful, he's greater than the enemy. He's greater than the evil one. He's greater than the devil who tries to steal Jesus' sheep.) In that context, Jesus then says "I and the Father are one." Now, what does that mean? That is a powerful, powerful statement. And you can see it can be taken in a number of different ways. It could be taken in terms of union with God, like "I and God are...we're one. We are united morally, or we see things the same way." But it could also be taken in terms of a unity of natures, "I and the Father are one", meaning "He is all-powerful and I am all-powerful." "He is God and I am God." So, how do we interpret this verse? Well, as always, the clue to explaining the verse is in the context. So, in the context of a discourse on the Good Shepherd, and in the context of verses in which Jesus has just said that the sheep ultimately belong to the Father — which means, "He is the good shepherd who has given the sheep to the son (given the sheep to Jesus)" — in that context, for Jesus to say "I

and the Father are one”, it implies that he’s identifying himself with the Divine Shepherd. And if you are wondering, “What do you mean ‘the divine shepherd’?” Well think of it from an ancient Jewish perspective. In the Old Testament scriptures, who is the Good Shepherd? Who is the image of the good shepherd used for? Well, it’s used for the Lord, the one God of Israel. The most famous example of this is of course Psalm 23. And what’s the first verse? Even people who don’t know anything about the Bible know the first verse of Psalm 23: “The Lord (and that’s the Hebrew letters YHWH – The Tetragrammaton) is my shepherd. I shall not want.” And then David goes on to give this whole Psalm where he depicts the Lord as the true shepherd. But then there are other passages as well. Ezekiel 34-36, I don’t have time to read from those passages, but in those chapters of the prophet Ezekiel, God himself talks about the wicked shepherds over Israel. He’s basically referring to the priests in the Jerusalem Temple, who instead of caring for the flock have slaughtered the lambs and fleeced them (literally), in terms of extorting them and abusing them. And so what God says is, “I myself will come and gather my flock” in Ezekiel 34-36. So God reveals that in the age of salvation, he is going to come as shepherd to gather his flock himself. Actually, now that I think about it, let’s go back and just look at those verses real quick. Even though they’re not in the readings for today, they’re actually very helpful. They’re the context for Jesus’ words. So if you go back to Ezekiel 34:11, this is what the prophecy says:

"For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

So notice, what is God saying? He’s saying because the shepherds of Israel (the chief priests and the elders) have proven themselves to be wicked, he is going to come in person and save his flock. He’s going to come in person and gather the scattered sheep of the people of Israel. So in that context, think about it, if you’re a first century Jew, you’re waiting for the age of the messiah, you’re waiting for the age of salvation, and you know the prophecy of Ezekiel, that God says, “In the future age of salvation, when I gather the people of Israel once again, I’m going to come myself and be the good shepherd.” In that context, Jesus now comes in the Temple and says, “I am the good shepherd, my sheep hear my voice. I know them. I give them eternal life.” And in that context he says, “I and the Father are one.” What’s he revealing? He’s revealing that he himself is the divine shepherd who has

come to gather his sheep. Now, it's a little unfortunate that the lectionary ends with verse 30. Because if you had any doubts about the interpretation I've just given you, that Jesus is claiming to be God when he says "I and the Father are one", all you would have to do is look at the next verses in the Gospel of John, because after Jesus says "I and the Father are one" (although the lectionary doesn't read it), verses 31-33 says this:

"I and the Father are one."

That is verse 30. Now look at verse 31.

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?" The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God."

However later interpreters might try to get out of the divine implications of Jesus' words by saying that he has a moral unity with God, or a spiritual unity with God, or some other kind of oneness with God other than divine nature, it's very clear that (in the Gospel of John) Jesus' original Jewish audience totally gets the point. They actually get it so clearly that they pick up stones to stone him to death, because the penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning. And he says, "Well wait, before you stone me, what good deed have I done that you're going to stone me for?" He's kind of tongue-in-cheek there. And they say, "We stone you for no good work but for blasphemy, because you being a man, make yourself God." The Greek word there is *theos* (in English, if you transliterate it). *Theos*, from which we get theology. So they understand he is making himself God. This is a climactic moment in the Gospel of John, where Jesus isn't just revealing he's the Good Shepherd, he's revealing his divinity. That he is the Divine Shepherd of Israel who has now come in person to save his people.

Okay, with that in mind, let's go back to the first reading for today. What is the first reading? It's from the Acts of the Apostles. We're continuing our journey here, but we're shifting our focus from the evangelistic activity of Peter and James in Jerusalem to the evangelism of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles. So in Acts 13:14 it says this:

[T]hey [meaning Paul and his companions] passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisid'ia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

And now the lectionary skips all the way down to verse 43 of chapter 13 and says this:

And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, `I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'"

That is a quote from the book of Isaiah.

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and went to Ico'nium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Okay, so what's being described here? This is the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in the Church of Antioch. And one of the things that's really significant about the church in Antioch is that there was a Jewish synagogue in Antioch. There's a Jewish population in that city. We know this from other ancient sources as well. There was a fairly large Jewish population. And so what we see here is Paul and Barnabas bringing the gospel outside the Holy Land, but notice what they do, they don't go immediately to the pagans, they don't go immediately to the gentiles. First, they go to the synagogue (in the city of Antioch) and they preach the gospel there. And no-

tice, we see three groups of people in this account of evangelization. First, we have the Jews. Remember I've talked about the *Ioudaios* (the Judeans), these are circumcised believers in the Torah of Moses, who follow the law, but then second, notice it mentions converts to Judaism; or in Greek (literally) "worshipping proselytes" (*prosēlytōn* is the Greek word) and *prosēlytōn*, it basically means "these are gentiles who believe in the God of Israel". They've accepted that there's only one God, the God of Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they haven't become Jews themselves because they haven't received circumcision for whatever reason. In fact there were a lot of these people who are mentioned in the book of Acts. Sometimes they're called God-fearers. They are basically Gentile converts to Judaism who've not yet received circumcision, or who may not even plan to receive circumcision, but they actually would go and listen to the teachings (like those given at the synagogue), they revered the Jewish scriptures, but they had not made the full transition into becoming members of the people of Israel through circumcision. And then finally, the Gentiles themselves, which would be complete non-Israelites who don't believe in the God of Israel at all, who are effectively pagans. So you have three categories: Jews, God-fearers, and Gentiles.

And all three of those groups, you're going to have conversions from those different groups, as Paul and Barnabas bring the gospel out to the nations. And why is this the case? Well, Paul and Barnabas say: "Because Isaiah prophesied that there would be a light to the nations and that salvation would not just go to the Jews, but would go to the ends of the earth." And so, we see a very important principle (and again, this is one of those misunderstandings that I have found common among some students): sometimes, there's a notion that in the Old Testament, God chose the Jewish people and rejected the pagans (the Gentiles), and then in the New Testament he changed his mind and he chose the Gentiles but rejected the Jewish people. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. That is complete caricature, both of the Old Testament and of the New Testament. Because in the Old Testament, already at the time of Solomon, Solomon builds a temple and he makes a court for the nations. There's a kind of evangelistic motion outward to bring the nations to worship the one God of Israel. That's already in the Old Testament. And the prophets say over and over again, that "the nations will worship God". So God is open to the nations in the Old Testament. And by contrast, in the New Testament, the same thing is true. God does not reject the Jewish people by any stretch of the imagination. I mean, Paul himself says in Romans 11, "The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." So what happens in Acts 13...we need to be really careful here that we don't misinterpret what's going on here. When it says that Paul "turns

to the Gentiles”, that does not mean that he abandons his Jewish brothers and sisters. That’s just not true. Over and over again in the book of Acts, you’ll see, every time Paul brings the gospel to a new city, he always goes to the synagogue first before he brings it to the local Gentiles. This is his principle from Romans 1: “Good news to the Jew first and then to the Greek.” The Jewish people always have priority in the reception and the proclamation of the Good News (of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus). It’s only when Paul is rejected by the local Jewish synagogue (or the local Jewish leaders) that he then turns to the local gentiles and begins bringing the Good News to them.

So it’s really important that we don’t universalize this local event. When Paul and Barnabas shake the dust off their feet and go to the Gentiles, that is a specific act against the synagogue in Antioch, it’s not a complete rejection of all of the Jewish people throughout the Greco-Roman world. That’s ridiculous, because in the very next chapters of Acts, if you look in Acts 18, Acts 19, as Paul continues to preach in other towns and cities, he’s going to go again to the synagogue. It’s always to the synagogue first and only then to the Gentiles if the synagogue (or the leaders of the synagogue) reject the message. And by the way, Paul is simply following Jesus’ instructions here. If you remember in the gospels, he sends the Apostles into various cities and he says, “You go into one town and the next town, and if a town or city rejects the gospel, shake the dust off of your feet and then move on.” So that’s the principle that’s being laid out here in Acts 13, I just think it’s really important for us to clarify what is not happening here and what is happening here. What is happening here is that Paul is turning from the local Jewish synagogue to the pagans, what is not happening here is that Paul is turning his back on his Jewish brothers and sisters, and refusing to bring the gospel to them. That’s just not the case.

Okay, in closing then I’d like to end with a little bit of Trinitarian Theology. I can’t help myself. It’s very important that we understand what Jesus means when he says “I and the Father are one.” And there are two great fathers of the Church: Hilary of Poitiers and then Augustine of Hippo, both of whom are writing in the 4th Century (although Hilary’s earlier than Augustine, he’s early in the 4th Century and Augustine’s late 4th – early 5th Century A.D.), but they’re both writing in Latin and they both wrote major works on the Trinity. Hilary’s is earlier, his book on the Trinity is a classic, he’s a Doctor of the Church for this writing, and then Augustine has the famous book on the Trinity, also titled *On The Trinity*, always a good title if you’re going to write a book on the Trinity (to call it, *On The Trinity*). And in both of

those texts they deal with the passage we had for today for the 4th Sunday of Easter: “I and the Father are one.” And so I just want to read to you from the words of St. Hilary and St. Augustine about what this statement means, and what it doesn’t mean. So, this is from St. Hilary:

Now seeing that the heretics cannot get around these words because they are so clearly stated and understood, they nevertheless try to explain them away. They maintain that the words “I and the Father are one” refer to a mere union of unanimity only; a unity of will, not of nature, that is, that the two are one not by essence of being but by identity of will...²

So notice here, Hilary’s talking about various heretics like the Arians, which as one of the great heresies of the early Church in the 4th Century that denied the eternal sonship of Jesus. And so some heretics that denied the divinity of Jesus would try to say, “Oh, well when Jesus says ‘I and the Father are one’, he just means a unity of will.” In other words, “We want the same thing. We think the same way. We will the same way.” And what Hilary’s saying is “No, the two are not one just by will, they have an identity of essence, of their being.” In other words, they share the divine nature or the divine substance. This is going to be the root of the language that we’re going to use in the creed, that Jesus Christ is begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father. We used to translate that “one in being”, but the more accurate translation of the Latin is consubstantial, of one’s substance. They share the same divine nature. That’s the interpretation Hilary’s given to John 10:30. So when Jesus says “I and the Father are one”, the oneness that they have is the oneness of the divine nature. Now you might think, “Dr. Pitre, I didn’t get a degree in philosophy. What do you mean by ‘nature’. I think of nature, I think of television shows about the natural world and birds and bees and animals.” That’s not what he means here by “nature”. He means the essence or the substance of what God is. So “nature” answers the question, “what”. So, what is Jesus? What is “the son”? He is the one God, he has the divine nature, and he shares that divine nature with the Father.

Now, as soon as we say that though, notice Jesus doesn’t just talk about one nature though. He also mentions two persons: “I” and “the Father”. So there’s both a oneness of nature (answering the question “what”), but a distinction of persons (answering the question, “who”): “I and the Father”. And so Augustine, in his book on

² Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 8.5; trans. NPNF

the trinity points out that this is a revelation in the mystery of the Trinity. He says this:

Mark both of those words, “one” and “are” (John 10:30)... In these two words, in that he said “one,” he delivers you from Arius [who taught that the Father *created* the Son and that the Son was therefore not true God]; in that he said “are,” he delivers you from Sabellius [who taught that the Son was just a ‘mode’ of the Father’s existence, not a distinct person in the Trinity].³

So that’s Augustine’s tractates on the Gospel of John. And he continues, he says:

He reveals that His own Godhead is *consubstantial with the Father* (for which reason He also says in another place: ‘I and the Father are one’ [John 10:30]) ... that is to say, in the consubstantial equality of *the same nature*.⁴

Okay, so this might seem a little complicated, and it’s because it’s the greatest mystery of the Christian faith, the central mystery is the mystery of the Trinity. We can’t fully comprehend it, but we can receive the mystery, which is the mystery of one God, one divine nature, but three persons, three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And so what Augustine is saying here is that Jesus’ words in John 10:30 protect us from two errors: the error of the Arian heretics, who said that Jesus (the son) was created. He was a creature, and therefore not God. So the oneness shows us that Jesus has the divine essence (he is God made man), so it protects us from Arianism. But the other error heresy out there, Sabellianism — most of us aren’t familiar with that — basically overemphasized the oneness of God and didn’t emphasize the distinction of the three persons. And Sabellius argued that, “Well the son is just like a ‘mode’ of the Father”, a kind of manner of manifesting himself. He’s not distinct from the Father, a distinct person. Sometimes Catholics actually will fall into this. If you’ve ever heard the analogy that the trinity is like three kinds of water (ice, water and vapor), and these different forms of the water are like the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Okay, don’t use that analogy to teach the Trinity to children, because that’s actually Sabellianism. That’s a perfect example of Sabellianism which is that there’s one God but he comes to us in different modes.

³ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 36.9; trans. NPNF

⁴ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 4.9

“They’re all the same, but they’re just in different modes.” No. There is one God, one “what”, the divine nature, but there are three distinct divine persons: The Son, The Father and The Spirit. And the Son is not the Father, and the Father is not the Son, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. There are these three distinct persons who are eternally united as the one God, the triune God, the Trinity. And so in this gospel for today (it’s so important), although it’s not Trinity Sunday, John 10:30, “I and the Father are one”, is one of the major texts in the Bible that begin to reveal to us the central mystery of the Christian faith, and that is the mystery of one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.