

An aging Jew was crossing the street in front of a Roman Catholic church. He was knocked down by a hit-and-run driver. As he lay there, half conscious, a priest hurried out, and prepared to administer the last rites. *"Do you believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost?"* the priest asked. *"I'm dying,"* cried the old man, *"and he's asking me riddles!"*

Peppermint Patty steps up to the store counter in a PEANUTS cartoon. She says, "Yes, sir . . . I need some school supplies . . . some pencils, some paper, a loose-leaf binder . . . and some answers . . . I need a lot of answers! *Don't we all?*"

LIFE IS FULL OF DIFFICULT QUESTIONS. Wouldn't you agree? There are many things in life WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND.

In many churches, today is Trinity Sunday. It is the day Christians celebrate the reality of God as three-persons-- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Wouldn't you agree that the Trinity is a confusing doctrine? Even the finest theologians find themselves at a loss to explain it well. Some use the analogy of the masks worn by actors in the old Greek tragedies. One actor wearing many masks can play many parts. But it is still just one actor.

Others have used the analogy of water. Under normal conditions, water, H₂O, is a liquid, but freeze it and it becomes a solid. Heat it and it becomes steam. It is still H₂O, whatever form it takes, but it can have three radically different forms.

Still others have used the analogy of roles and relationships. A man can be at the same time a father, a son, a husband, a nephew, etc. One man but many roles.

Those is not the perfect analogy, but any of these are the best we can do with the minds God has given us.

One of the most prominent Christians who ever lived was a man we know as St. Augustine. Augustine was converted to Christianity in A.D. 386 by the writings and sermons of Ambrose, the bishop of Milan. Ten years later Augustine became a bishop himself and served at Hippo on the coast of northern Africa, in the area we now call Algeria. It is said that one day Augustine was walking along the seashore pondering how **God could be One and yet Three.** Suddenly he stopped and watched a child who was carrying a cup of ocean water to a small hole he had dug in the sand. "What are you doing?" asked Augustine. The child replied, "I'm trying to pour the ocean into this hole." The bishop laughed and said, "That's impossible." The child stared into his eyes and said, *"It is no more impossible than for you to put Almighty God into your small mind."*

And it's true. The Trinity is one of those many things about life and faith that you and I will never understand.

In that sense we are like Lewis Carroll's Alice in her first adventure in Wonderland. Remember how Alice pursued the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole and suddenly found herself standing in a long low hall? There were doors all around the hall, but they were all locked; and when Alice had been all the way down one side and up the other, trying every door trying to escape, she walked sadly down the middle, wondering how she was ever to get out again.

Suddenly she came upon a little three-legged table all made of solid glass. There was nothing on it except a tiny golden key, and Alice's first thought was that it might belong to one of the doors of the hall. But, alas! either the locks were too large, or the key was too small. At any rate it would not open any of them.

However, the second time round, she came upon a low curtain she had not noticed before, and behind it was a little door about fifteen inches high. She tried the little golden key in the lock, and to her great delight it fit!

Alice opened the door and found that it led into a small passage, not much larger than a rat hole. She knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw. How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains, but she could not even get her head through the doorway. *"And even if my head would go through,"* thought poor Alice, *"it would be very little use without my shoulders. How I wish I could shut up like a telescope..."*

It was then that she returned to the little table to find a bottle with a large paper label on it saying, "**DRINK ME.**" Alice ventured to taste it, and finding it very nice, she very soon finished it off.

She wondered if it was having the desired effect. And so, it was indeed. She was now only ten inches high, and her face brightened up at the thought that she was now the right size for going through the little door into that lovely garden. First, however, she waited for a few minutes to see if she was going to shrink any further. She felt a little nervous about this; "for it might end, you know," Alice said to herself, "in my going out altogether, like a candle. I wonder what I should be like then?"

After a while, finding that nothing more happened, she decided on going into the garden at once. But alas for poor Alice! When she got to the door, she found she had forgotten the little golden key, and when she went back to the table for it, she found she could not possibly reach it. She could see it quite plainly through the glass, and she tried her best to climb up the table-legs, but it was too slippery; and when she had tired herself out with trying, the poor little thing sat down and cried.

We can sympathize with Alice, can't we? There are many secrets in life WE are just too SHORT SPIRITUALLY to reach the key for. Not only is it hard for us to reach and understand the challenging "*doctrine like the Trinity,*" but also ordinary matters like, "*why do good people suffer? Why is life sometimes so unfair? What is the purpose of aging? Why does God not make faith a little easier, etc.?*"

THERE IS MUCH THAT NONE OF US CAN UNDERSTAND... Having established that, however, there is a second thing to be said:

THE SECRET OF A SUCCESSFUL LIFE IS NOT JUST UNDERSTANDING IT AND ALL THAT LIFE PRESENTS...BUT PUTTING OUR TRUST IN GOD.

IT IS TRUE... *We can either spend our lives being miserable about what does not make sense or we can live joyful lives based on TRUST IN GOD.*

You and I may not be able to understand the mystery of God, the "THREE-IN-ONE" but WE can enjoy the incredible beauty of God the creator.

I may not understand how the Bethlehem's babe "*can in the Godhead be,*" as the song says, but I can read with awe the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. If anyone has ever lived closer to God than he, I'm certainly not aware of it. I may not understand all there is to understand about that Comforter that Jesus said he would send us, but there have been times when that **Comforter, the Holy Spirit, has enveloped me with love.** I don't have to understand God in three persons in order to experience the grandeur of what those three persons can mean in my life. **The secret of a successful life is not understanding but trust.**

Catherine Marshall, the author of many fine books including the bestseller, CHRISTY, and the widow of the well-known pastor Peter Marshall, was told during a routine physical checkup IN 1943 that she was infected with tuberculosis. It was a devastating blow! The doctors ordered her to bed twenty-four hours a day. There she waited. And waited. In her book BEYOND OUR SELVES Catherine notes that fifteen months later she had gained some fifteen pounds. Otherwise nothing was changed. The area of infection was as widespread as the beginning. Other specialists were consulted. They had no answers, and could only recommend more bed rest. **When Catherine and her husband Peter asked how long, the doctors replied that they had no idea.**

Writing in retrospect, Catherine described this time as (3) weary, endless years. Over and over she asked the question, "*Why, oh why do I have to lie here month after month? Why can't the doctors do something?*"

Yet it was during this time that Catherine learned many important spiritual lessons. She became keenly aware that there were no shortcuts. God alone was in charge. She learned to deal ruthlessly and fully with sin in her life. She committed her life completely to Jesus Christ as Lord during that time. The seeds of her ministry of writing were planted during this period of resting. She developed an increasingly strong faith in God's ability to heal. At first, she was told there was no

progress. Then x-rays began to show progress. And finally, she was pronounced well. In addition, as her faith was strengthened, Catherine Marshall was able to reach out with word and pen and encourage others.

Catherine Marshall's super successful life is not a testimony to understanding, **BUT TO TRUST.** There are many things too deep for us to fathom, but we can still trust.

But there is one final thing to be said: ONE DAY EVERYTHING WILL BE REVEALED.

Do you believe that? St. Paul wrote, "*Now we see through a glass darkly but then face to face.*" (I Corinthians 13: 12a) I look forward to that day, don't you? I look forward to having some of the pieces of the puzzle put into place.

In order to save money, a college drama class purchased only a few scripts of a certain play and cut them up into the separate parts. The director gave each player his individual part in order and then started to rehearse the play. But nothing went right. After an hour of missed cues and mangled sequences, the cast gave up. At that point, the director sat the actors all on the stage and said: "*Look, I'm going to read the entire play to you, so don't any of you say a word.*" He read the entire script aloud, and when he was finished, one of the actors said:

"So that's what it was all about!" And when they understood the entire story, they were able to fit their parts together and have a successful rehearsal.

C. S. Lewis once said that the most frequently spoken word in heaven would be, "OH." As in, "**Oh, now I understand.**" Or, "**Oh, now I see what God's plan was.**" Or, "**Oh, now I see the reason for the trial I went through.**"

We do not have that luxury in this world. **We walk by faith, not by knowledge.** But one day it will be revealed to us. **We will be in the presence of the Father and the Son and the Spirit.** How can we be in the presence of all three at the same time? It beats me, but as St. Paul says in another place, "*I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.*" (II Timothy 1: 12)

Can you accept that and live by it? There are some answers that are too large for our little brains to contain.

But our greatest need is not understanding, but trust that God is with us, whether we experience God as Father, Son or Holy Spirit. **God is with us and will be with us until that day comes when all will be revealed.** Amen.