

Chapter 1:

Albert, called by God's fervor to be Patriarch of the Church in Jerusalem, bids health in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit to his beloved sons in Christ, B., and the other hermits under obedience to him, who live near the spring on Mount Carmel.



I have heard a lot said about the writing of our Rule in the form of a letter, much conjecture about who brother "B." really was, why Patriarch Albert did not use his full name and who precisely were these hermits, but I have not yet heard anyone mention the most interesting part of this opening: The Rule, from the very beginning and first greeting, is trinitarian. Albert does not merely greet his brothers in Christ, as one could easily and often expect from such a letter, but in the name of the Lord, the Holy Spirit and as sons in Christ.

He greets the community of hermits, and us, just as we are baptized into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I do not know if this was an intentional move by Albert-- it is hard to imagine that anything he wrote was not done intentionally-- but in either case, he is greeting the brothers into their new way of life according to the same way that they had entered and were received into their first life in Christ and under the same name of God.

And so we begin our life, and perhaps it would be fitting to include these words in our profession of vows, with this simple greeting in the name of our One God, that our life from here forward enjoy good health in the Lord, in the blessing of the Holy Spirit as his beloved sons in Christ.

CHAPTER 1: MEDITATE ON THE HOLY TRINITY

Meditate on the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit



We begin our Christian life, baptized in the “The name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” yet I often wonder in modern times if we truly appreciate the importance of this Name or how much emphasis we really place on the Name of God under which we were baptized.

The priest begins mass: “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of the Father and Grace of the Holy Spirit be with each of you.” And we respond: “And with your spirit.” How many of us accept the greeting? And how many of us expect him to then say “Good morning.” Do we realize that we have just been greeted in the most profound way, and with the strongest blessing that can be given to someone, or even remember how powerful of a statement it is to claim One name of God in three?

The trinitarian name of God was no small or insubstantial matter for the early days of the church. The idea of One God in three did not come from some obscure Hebrew sect, nor was it borrowed from one of the surrounding pagan cultures. The principle that three could exist in and as one was not a Greek concept filtering into Judaism—it was, in fact, a great stumbling block and for many, proof of Jesus’ heresy and his followers’ idiocy.

Common sense tells us that there is no way that three could equal one. And if there is a Father and a Son, then the Son must come from the Father and the Father must have been before the Son, in order to give birth to the Son; The Father must be more than the Son as any child is born as a piece of and something less than their mother and father; and they must be different, no matter how metaphorical and abstract our poetry may be a son is not the father, nor the father a son, which means that they are two gods, along with the Spirit who is a third. Monotheism and the belief in One True God can not abide a Trinity, unless, if we insist that there is only one God, then these three must not be different, but the same God coming to His people in different ways: the Father is God when He created the heavens and the earth, He is the Son when Jesus walked and spoke with his disciples, and He is the Spirit when He descended upon the apostles at Pentecost and spoke to Moses through the fiery bush. This would be that He is one God presenting Himself and acting in different ways. And if this is true, then who did Jesus pray to when he addressed the Father on the night of his arrest? How did the Spirit descend upon Jesus after John baptized him in the Jordan?

The idea of a trinitarian God, of three persons in One and these three named in a single name seems to defy everything we know about the world around us, and it was no different for the early years of the church. All of these points, and many more, were argued over for centuries. The trinitarian nature and identity of God was such a controversial issue of the faith that bishops were thrown into prison and others banished to exile; *heretics* were killed for claiming either that Jesus was a little less than a God or that He was only God temporarily; accusations were so elaborate that one theologian, who had been accused of cutting off the hands of a priest had to present the priest to the pope, with both hands still attached. It is sad to say, that these things, along with every kind of political shenanigan we can imagine went on in church for centuries, but that they did is a part of our human history, the history of the Church and our struggle to understand just what it meant for God to have walked among us, to have died for us, and to be raised from the dead. One can also reasonably argue that our understanding of the Trinity is the source of the division between the Eastern and Western Catholic churches. People do not fight, and divide and go to such great efforts over small matters.

Can we imagine, in our time and culture, of even being in an argument over the name of the Holy Trinity? Do we ever pause to think about what it means that the Son is truly God and present at the foundations of the World, that in the “beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...” or that when we call upon the Holy Spirit, Christ and the Father are both present? Do we ever think about what it means that when the Son is nailed to the Cross for our redemption, that so too are the Father and the Spirit? Have we considered how their share in the same event may have something to do when a husband or wife (or a mother) may say, “when you cry, I cry; when you bleed, I bleed; when you hunger I hunger,” ; or when Jesus answered to his disciples, “Whosoever you did it to these, you did it to me.” Does the trinitarian Name of God have something profound to do with our own nature, and with what it means when we partake in the Eucharist, to be united in Christ and share in the lives of those we also love?

The Trinity is a hard matter to understand, and some of it is quite simply beyond our ability to comprehend, yet it remains one of the most central and powerful aspects of our faith. To begin in this Name is no trivial matter of ritual or formality, nor is it a minor part of our prayer, but is the essence of God that was revealed in Christ and it is the one thing that may tell us more about who God is, about who we are, our relationship to Him, His relationship with us and our relationship to one another than any other aspect of our Faith. It is in this way, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that we began our Christian life, that we begin each prayer and with which we may greet each day.

Be attentive when you speak the name of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and meditate on this mystery during times of silence, and at various other times throughout the day. If it is appropriate and you are able, place an icon of the Holy Trinity in a prominent place in your home, near a family altar, or in a place for meditation; that you may be constantly reminded of this Holy Name and Presence.

Greet one another in the name of the Lord

Greet one another in the name of our Lord

Patriarch Albert opens his letter with a greeting to the brothers in a rich and elaborate way that seems foreign, and possibly even absurd by today's standards. I would not dare to have even thought of beginning this, or any other book with such an opening: Kendall, your brother in Christ and filled with a fervent love of Him who first loved us, gave His Son that we may have life and the Spirit of Wisdom, offer you my prayers for good health and a strong spirit. Such a greeting should be reserved to Popes and Bishops in official church documents or significant letters, and even if during Albert's time they were used more often and more eloquently, we live in a different time and different culture. But if we take this particular formality and length away, what remains?

How we greet people, whether it is in a formal letter and legal document, or the more mundane email, text message and day-to-day encounter is significant and meaningful. How differently would we feel about, and even respond to an email that began with, Dear Kendall, rather than jumping right in with: "Where is the file?" Or if a text message began with "Good morning," rather than bluntly stating "Can you stop and get some milk?" With the rise of digital communication and social media, general greetings have widely disappeared, and whether or not we have gotten used to terse emails and text messages, with them we have lost a lot more than mere niceties and platitudes. When we greet one another, we offer—and receive—a welcome; we express good wishes; we acknowledge the other person as a person; and we engage with them on a personal level. In essence, to greet one another is an expression of love so that to begin our encounters without such an introduction skips a very meaningful and valuable part of our relationships; and as a Christian, we are to greet one another in a particular way.

As the apostle says, "Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ." Christians in the East continue this tradition, it is not some European tradition that they have retained, but even the kiss on the cheeks that we see the French and others do, found its origins in this apostolic appeal. In the western church, and particularly in the United States, we have lost this practice, and it would be odd, and even inappropriate, if some of us began kissing strangers in church

At the core of Albert's formality is the essential notion that in writing to the brothers he greets them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In your writings, in emails and text messages, be sure to greet your brothers and sisters in a way that is appropriate and in the name of Christ. Yes, this even means that we should begin our letters and emails with such a greeting, "May the love of Christ be with you." Do not greet all in this way, bearing in mind always that this is the proper greeting to fellow Christians. The reasons for this is threefold. First, our greetings are a sign of mutual recognition. We ordinarily see this when we may say "Good morning," to someone and they retort harshly, "Yeah? What's good about?!" It is the same when we greet someone in the name of Christ. When on Easter we say to someone "Christ is Risen," we are opening and inviting our relationship around this cornerstone. Here again is why the loss of our normal and daily greetings have cost us so much more than we are aware. Those first words that we use, set the stage and the moment of our relationship with that person. If that person is not a Christian, then we are beginning that relationship on either a point of disagreement, or on an empty pretense, as though to share a greeting in the name of our Lord is equal to "Good morning," or "how are you?"

Secondly, if our greeting in Christ does in fact have any significance and meaning, then that meaning should not be wasted on those who do not believe in Him, but His blessings are upon those who believe and have confessed His name. Otherwise, our confession has little, or no value. The third reason is that to greet someone with the blessing of a Lord that they do not recognize can be inappropriate, and even insulting, as you may be insulted by one who greets you in the name of Allah, Vishnu or some other strange god, but we are not without the same love and kindness for all people.

We can be reminded that to greet in the name of the Lord carries a second meaning, that we greet others on his behalf, standing in his person as a member of his mystical body. Particularly with those who are not Christian, or whom you are unsure, greet them in a normal and friendly way: hello, good morning, good afternoon... so that they receive the same benefits of friendship and kindness that we offer to all of God's people. For this is how Christ would also greet them and as you greet them in his name, you welcome them in his love.

Here, as in all cases, we should let common sense be our guide. Often times we will email a person several times in a day, sometimes very quickly back-and-forth like a conversation through the written, rather than vocal word. It would seem odd and possibly overwhelming to include such a greeting in every email, especially since sometimes the entire body may be a simple "yes." But as we would greet someone once at the beginning of a conversation, so greet them once at the beginning of a first email, or text message, and always in a way that is appropriate to the person and the circumstance, as Albert greeted his brothers in the way that was appropriate to the presentation of the Rule.