

Devotion on Hymns (Hymn 266 - Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty) – 1 October 2013, Anno Domini



Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. (Isaiah 6:3) Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy. (Lev 19:2)

One characteristic of God stands out above all others - His Holiness! Since He is Holy, He cannot abide in His presence any who are not Holy; therefore, His people, too, must be Holy. They are Holy in their reverence and worship of Him in the outward form, and Holy and pure of heart in the inward graces of their hearts. We worship God in the Beauty of Holiness, or we do not worship God at all. We do not scream, or roll on the floor, in our worship; but observe a still and quiet both before and after worship. We are in a prayer attitude throughout the worship service. Our outward manifestation of Holiness in worship must be reflected in our lives beyond the doors of the church. Our prayers must be prayers of Holiness, our worship must be Holy, our hymns must reflect that Holiness, and our love and service, too, must be the earnest of our Holiness. So our ceremonial holiness should be consistent with our LIVING Holiness. There are many hymns which point to that majestic and perfect Holiness of God that we sing regularly from the 1940's Hymnal, but there is one that captures its meaning perhaps more vividly than any other - Holy, Holy, Holy.

This great Hymn of the Church (Hymn 266 in the 1940 Hymnal) repeats the word HOLY three times in succession in its opening line and several times thereafter. This is a tacit acknowledgement of the Triune God. This is one of the church's all-time favorites for all occasions and, especially, for the processional.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty

*Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.*

*Holy, holy, holy! All saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.*

*Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee
perfect in power, in love, and purity.*

*Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.*

This classic hymn was composed by Reginald Heber and first published in 1826. Alfred Lord Tennyson considered this hymn to be the greatest ever written. It is sung to the tune of Nicaea, by John Bacchus Dykes. Why Nicaea? The music for the hymn is named after the Council of Nicaea in which the defense of Trinitarian doctrine prevailed against the Arians. This hymn is the greatest on record in revealing the beauty of the Trinity in all Holiness to worshippers. It was a young giant named Athanasius who stood firm in defense of Trinitarian doctrine at that Council and emerged as a hero of the faith. As you will know, classical hymns are designed to teach us doctrine and to honor and glorify God. This hymn meets all tests.

*Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.*

This stanza takes its inspiration from the text of Rev 4:8b: "***Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.***" Our songs (and prayers) are to rise to the Throne of God at first light, or even before. The true lover thinks first of the love of his heart at dawn - so does the lover of God take knowledge first of God at the moment of awakening. God is the Most High, and we are very low in station. The incense at the altar in the Temple represented the songs and prayers of the people rising to God on High. So our best offering - better than gold and fine metals - is our prayers and hymns in the morning, and all of the day following. If we will see God in His sanctuary, we must begin when the Light is dispersed on the Eastern sky. "***O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.***" (Psalms 63:1-2) Not only do we acknowledge God at first burst of dawn, but also during the long night watches as an ardent lover his promised bride. "***With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.***" (Isaiah 26:9) This stanza goes on to state the great doctrine of truth: God is Holy. Christ is Holy. The Spirit is Holy.

*Holy, holy, holy! All saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.*

Are you a saint of God? You should be if you claim Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior; and, if you do, then you must ADORE Him as well. To ADORE does not mean to like, to appreciate, to approve, or to admire. To ADORE means to place all of your concentration on the Holiness and Glory of His Being. Do you do that to the exclusion

of earthly concerns. Do you cast down your crown of glory around the political sea of nations, tribes, and peoples to the glory and honor of God alone? If the mighty Angels of God, and those who keep watch at His very Throne, fall down to worship Him, how can we as mere mortals do less? He is the Great I AM!. He was, He is, and He shall forever BE! At all points, He is I AM! He is the Alpha and Omega - the first, last, and all in between of our alphabets. ***"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."*** (Rev 1:8) Do you not begin to see a great pattern emerge that characterizes all classical hymns of the church? They are FULL of Biblical Truths.

*Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love, and purity.*

Darkness does hide God, but not from the approach of those who love and seek Him. The thick and suffocating darkness that sin generates produces such darkness as obscures the thought and visage of God from us. Being a great distance from God deprives us of His Light of Life and Truth for wherever God is, there can be no darkness at all. Only God is Holy. We are accounted Holy only as covered and redeemed by the Blood of Christ. Once more, we have that "Imputed Holiness" of Christ and not of our own. None can stand at the place of God. He alone is perfect in power, in love, and in purity. Perfect love precludes the use of His perfect power in bringing us to judgment. That perfect LOVE is exemplified in the only Begotten Son of God - our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.*

Could we take a lesson from nature itself whose God made all? This morning in my early walk, I saw a bed of Morning Glories opening their beautiful robes to the rising sun. They ALWAYS do! The Sunflower opens wide to the bright sun and their faces follow the sun across the heavens. should we not be as those Morning Glories and those Sunflowers to behold God at first light and follow His ways across the wide heaven? The Sun and Moon are but signs of that greater Light that is God. The moon is the lesser light because it possesses no light of its own. Its light is a borrowed, or reflected, light of the greater sun. It is just this same way that our lights are not our own, but the borrowed or reflected light of our Greater Light Source which is God. If we allow any material concerns to come between us and our Light Source, we will be in darkness. in the same way the earth suffers darkness during a Lunar eclipse.

Mercy is a great virtue. It is common to show mercy on those we know and love. But we often withhold mercy from strangers, don't we? We are not mighty and magnanimous as God is. His mercy is all the more remarkable because of his all-powerfulness. God is One and exist in Three Persons juts as St Patrick has taught that the Shamrock has one stem and three petals. The three petals do not preclude the Shamrock from being one plant. If it had only one, two, of



five petals, it would not be a Shamrock. God Himself is THREE-DIMENSIONAL! He has infinite height, infinite depth, and infinite width. But take away only one of those dimensions and you would not have God. The conclusion to the hymn is characteristic of its overriding virtue: "*God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!*" Were we ever committed to the dark pits of prison in chains, we may not have a Bible to hold, but we can have a hymn in our hearts to sing out the blessings and truths of God's Word.