

The Trinity

Opening Prayer: *The Nicene Creed*

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father
and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning
is now, and ever shall be
world without end.

Amen.

Key Points about the Trinity

- Christians only worship one God (monotheism).
- The doctrine of the Trinity is *NOT* directly stated or explained in scripture.
- The doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to logically deduce something about the nature of God from scripture and the earliest Christian traditions.
- Ultimately, the doctrine of the Trinity is a “*mystery*:”
 - the nature of God is not fully understandable by fallible & limited human minds
 - goal for tonight is to argue that it is a “reasonable” belief, not to “prove” the belief is true

The Doctrine of the Trinity

- There is ONE God.
- God has one essence / nature / substance
 - one *WILL* and *ACTION*
- We experience God in 3 “hypostases” (“persons”)

Father*	Creator, <i>Our Father</i>	source of all things, we are children of God
Son	Redeemer, Savior	became human, suffered for us, took our sins upon Himself
Spirit	Sanctifier, Sustainer	works with and through us, helps us “hear” God

Story of the Blind Men and the Elephant

- “persona” means “mask” in Latin (“per sonare” or “to sound through”), it is a word used in ancient theater (like “*dramatis personae*”)
- unlike our own notion of an “individual” being, in the ancient world the word “person” did *NOT* imply that the being has an “individual will” or what we might call a “personality”
- There are distinctions (“differences”) between the hypostases (“persons”)
 - Relationship by Origin:
 - ▶ The Son is *eternally **begotten*** by the Father.
 - ▶ The Spirit *eternally **proceeds*** from the Father and the Son (*originally just the Father*)
 “*eternally begotten:*” there was never a time when this was not true,
 the Father has always been a “father”
 - Role in the “Divine Economy” (God’s plan to reveal himself and communicate with us)
 - ▶ Son’s incarnation (“becoming flesh”), suffering, and rising from the dead
 - ▶ Holy Spirit guides and strengthens us, drawing us towards God

Catechism of the Catholic Church 239

By calling God "Father," the LANGUAGE of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority; and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children. ***God's parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood,*** which emphasizes God's immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature. The language of faith thus draws on the human experience of parents, who are in a way the first representatives of God for man. But this experience also tells us that human parents are fallible and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood. ***We ought therefore to recall that God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman: he is God.*** He also transcends human fatherhood and motherhood, although he is their origin and standard: no one is father as God is Father.

Discussion: What are “mysteries” to you or in your life?

Mystery:
a profound truth that
is not fully explainable
or understandable

Key Point:

We are limited in how we know God:
We only know God through His manifestations in the world,
the roles God plays in the world.

Origin of the Doctrine of the Trinity

- *The Jewish Inheritance: Monotheism (“One-God-Belief”)*
 - There is only one God. We are to worship the one true God.
- Scripture & Traditions established by the Early Christians
 - Jesus, the Christ (= *Messiah*) is God.
 - The Holy Spirit – sent by God / the Christ – guides us after Jesus left time and space.
 - ▶ Early Christians worshipped Jesus (indicated by scripture, traditional prayers, writings)
 - ▶ Baptism: “*I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*” (based on Matthew 28:19)
 - ▶ Eucharistic Prayer: “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*” (from 2 Corinthians 13:13, one of the earliest surviving Christian writings - no more than 20 or 30 years after the death of Jesus at most)
- Are Jesus and the Holy Spirit “lesser” gods? (*Arianism*)
 - Jesus could be half-man, half-divine like heroes in Greek mythology (e.g., Heracles, Perseus) or like the Roman Emperor according to pagan belief.
 - Jesus could be the intermediary of the “ONE” (transcendent being) in Greek philosophy, typically called the *Logos* (= “the Word”) in Greek philosophy
- Do we have direct access to God? Or can we only know him through intermediaries? (like the CEO of a company or a king who only interacts with us through messengers)
 - Transcendence of God: God is far “above us”: good, all knowing, powerful, incomprehensible
 - ▶ *God’s transcendence can be used to emphasize humans’ insignificance or unimportance*
- Consensus at Early Church Councils (300s A.D.):
 - God *IS* transcendent (“far beyond us and our understanding”)
BUT Jesus’ message was that God desires & offers a **direct** personal relationship with us:
 - ▶ Jesus was “God with us” (*Emmanuel*) in time and space
 - ▶ The Holy Spirit is with us

In ancient Greek philosophy, hypostases (“under substances”) are typically substances that underly or are fundamental to reality in some way. However, they are individual things that in turn share in a deeper “ousia” (something like divine nature or essence or deeper being).

Implications of the Doctrine of the Trinity

- Different people relate better to a particular aspect of God, intellectually or emotionally.

Discussion:

Which “person” in the Trinity do you relate to best?

For example, who do you imagine you are talking to when you pray?

When do you feel in the presence of the Father? of Jesus?

When do you feel filled with the Holy Spirit?

- God the Father: have the confidence to see yourself as a beloved child of God.
- The Incarnation and the Gift of the Spirit
 - an affirmation of the importance and value of being human and of human life
 - God “knows what it is like” to be human and is here “with us” always
- “*Many Gifts, One Spirit*” & Relationships: The importance of being a “community.”
 - We “commune” with God (God is in us, is in the Creation).
 - No one is alone; “no man is an island.” We are connected to one another.

▶ We are not “saved” alone:

do not just focus on “my own” relationship with God.

The Lord’s Prayer:

*“When you pray, say: **Father**,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread...”*

Jesus is not *MY* savior,
Jesus is *OUR* savior

Closing Prayer

Gracious Father, draw us into your love through the Holy Spirit. Teach us to see your hand in all things and in one another. Grant this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

In Christ, God seeks to become continually more incarnate in the world, not via an order imposed on it, but by a differentiating, liberating, and personalizing communion with it.

- John F. Haught discussing the thinking of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Jesus promised to send us a **paraclete**, often translated as “advocate,” “helper,” or “comforter.” It means something like someone called to provide help or “one who comes alongside” (walks with you). In ancient Greece, your defense attorney was your paraclete!

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you... The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you. (John 14:15-26)