

The Trinity

God, our Father, who by sending into the world the Word of truth and the Spirit of sanctification made known to the human race your wondrous mystery, grant us, we pray, that in professing the true faith, we may acknowledge the Trinity of eternal glory and adore your Unity, powerful in majesty. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen Collect for the Mass on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

We confess you, we praise you, and we bless you, God the Father, the unbegotten, God the Son, the Only Begotten, and God the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, all holy and undivided Trinity. (Traditional Antiphon)

“We may think the doctrine of the Trinity is too complicated or abstract to make much of a difference in our day-to-day life. Yet, ‘the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching’ (CCC 234). The Trinity is who God really is: a real, personal, wise, and loving God. And because he has revealed to us who he really is, we can really speak to him and love him: ‘O my Three, my all, my beatitude, infinite solitude, immensity in which I lose myself... Bury yourself in me that I may bury myself in you until I depart to contemplate in your light the abyss of your greatness’ (St. Elizabeth of the Trinity). Life in the Trinity is truly the whole point of the Christian faith and the goal of every human life.” Introductory Comment to the Mass of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity in *Magnificat*, June 16, 2019

I. The Process of Theology

- A. The Challenges of Speaking about the God/Trinity – CCC 39-43, Isa 55:8-9
- B. Theology/Economy of Trinity; a mystery of faith revealed by God, inaccessible to reason alone – CCC 236-237, 50
- C. Faith – Theology – Belief
- D. Hierarchy of Truths – CCC 234, 90
- E. “But it’s not in the Bible” – CCC 82

II. The Trinity in Scripture

- A. Selections from OT/NT
 - Deut 6:4-5 – “The Lord is One”; 1 Cor 8:6
 - Gen 1:2 – “a mighty wind swept over the waters”
 - Joel 2:28 – “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh”
 - Isa 55:10-11 – The word of God is fertile and fruitful
 - Gen 18 – three men visit Abraham
 - John 20:28 – “My Lord and my God”
 - John 1:1 – “... and the Word was God”
 - John 17:1 – “Father, glorify your Son, so that the Son might glorify you”
 - Luke 3:22 – “You are my Son...” Luke 9:35 – “This is my Son...”
 - John 10:30 – “The Father and I are one”

- John 20:22 – “He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”
 - John 16:13 – “When the Spirit of truth comes, ...he will glorify me...”
 - 2 Cor 13:13 – “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”
 - Matt 28:19 – “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit...”
 - The doctrine of the Trinity can be regarded as the outcome of a process of sustained and critical reflection on the pattern of divine activity revealed in Scripture, and continued in Christian experience
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- C. Three Christological Hymns
- Philippians 2:6-11
 - Colossians 1:15-20
 - John 1:1-18

III. Core Doctrine of the Trinity

- A. There is only one God
- B. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is each God
- C. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not the same

IV. Early Heresies

- A. Modalism – in an effort to affirm the oneness of God, they denied any difference between Father and Son (and the Holy Spirit by implication). The F, S and HS are only different “modes” in which the one God interacts w/ his creation, i.e. different ways God presents himself, or different roles that God assumes in dealing w/ humanity. Therefore, Father and Son and HS are really one person. So, you could say that the Father was crucified, or that the Son descended on the apostles at Pentecost. They were wrong in denying the three distinct persons of God (violating #C above)
- B. Arianism – Arius denied that the Son could really be God, because God’s essence (*ousia*) could not be shared. Such sharing, he argued, would imply a division in God. So, he viewed the Son as a creature, glorious and powerful, but not eternal like the Father. He is “created by the will of God before time” and summoned into existence from nothing. But he was not existent before he was begotten. His famous slogan was: “There was a time when he was not.” Since he is a created being, he is infinitely inferior to the Creator, yet vastly superior to every other created thing. The Father is other than the Son in substance (*ousia*). (violating #B above)
- C. Tritheism – is the belief in three independent but equal gods who choose to exist and function together. The Father is God, the Son is God and the HS is God. That’s three gods, right? Since they all share in the one divine nature or substance, why aren’t they identified as three gods? But, there is a single divine substance (*ousia*) which subsists in three persons (*hypostases*). “Each person considered in himself is entirely God” (CCC

256). F, S, and HS is each true God, God is not divided into thirds or identified as three different gods. (violating # A above)

V. The Trinity in Tradition

- A. The more emphatic the Church became that Christ was God, the more it came under pressure to clarify how Christ related to God.
- B. **“economy of salvation”** – “the way in which God has ordered the salvation of humanity in history” (Irenaeus). See CCC 236 and the CCC’s Glossary definition. The economy of salvation means that God is active in creation, with each person distinct yet not divided or separate or independent of each other. The complexity of the human experience of redemption is thus the result of the three persons of the Godhead acting in distinct yet coordinated manners in human history, without any loss of the total unity of the Godhead.
- C. **“perichoresis”** – deals with the manner in which the F/S/HS relate to each other; the mutual inter-existence of the three persons of the Trinity. Their individuality is maintained while insisting that each shares in the life of the other two. The F/S/HS are not three isolated and diverging compartments of the Godhead.
- D. Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed – 325 + 381
 - Affirms the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity
 - Affirms the Christology of descent, i.e. Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14)
 - Affirms that God has always been a Trinity, and there never was a time that the Son of God did not exist
 - Affirms that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit share the same divine essence as God the Father, and so it is appropriate to worship Christ and the HS, for when one worships the Son of God or the Spirit of God, one is worshipping God.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father almighty,

- ✓ Trinity includes Son and HS, yet still the oneness of God remains
- ✓ God’s omnipotence excludes the existence/powers of any other gods
 - ✓ God as *pantokrator*, all-powerful; all prayer assumes this
- ✓ God is not an impersonal force. God as Father suggests power + authority, knowing + loving
 - ✓ See CCC 238-239 on God as Father

maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

- ✓ Affirms the goodness of all creation, both spiritual and material; rejects idea that matter is evil
- ✓ Rejects heretical (Gnostics, Docetists) notion that the Creator identified in the OT is a lesser divinity. Here, the Father of the Son is one and the same Creator God.
- ✓ Ps 104 celebrates God’s ongoing creative power, sustaining creation at every moment

**I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,**

- ✓ The Title “Lord” (*Kyrios*) is a testimony to the divinity of Christ. It’s an alternate for the divine name in the OT. Even though the Father and the Son are distinct, they are unified in divinity
- ✓ We acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, deserving the same worship/obedience as God the Father
- ✓ To be *begotten* means the Son’s existence has a source wh/ is the Father, i.e. he is uniquely *generated* from God’s own nature. This begetting is not a making by God but a sharing by the Father out of himself. The Father has no source, and is therefore, *unbegotten*.
- ✓ To be begotten/generated from the Father means the Son shares the same divine substance as the Father, yet is simultaneously distinct from the Father.
- ✓ John 1:1 affirms this: “the Word was with God” (distinct from the Father); and “the Word was God” (the same divinity)

born of the Father before all ages.

- ✓ The Son is co-eternal with the Father! (much debated at Nicea). Arianism claimed the Son was created and did not exist before his creation, and thus is subordinate to the Father. “There was a time when he was not.” (Arian slogan) implies there was a time when the Father was not a Father and God was not a Trinity. So, Nicea affirmed there was never a time when the Son did not exist. The Father and the Son share the same eternity.

**God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,**

- ✓ The Son is no less divine than the Father.
- ✓ It also reminds us of the distinction between F + S. The Father is God and the Son is God from God, etc. The F + S are one but not one and the same.
 - ✓ In both OT + NT light is associated w/ divine presence, for God’s glory

begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;

- ✓ Another Anti-Arian statement: for Arius, the Son is a creature. “There was a time when he [the Son] was not.” But, if Jesus is subordinate to God, he cannot be savior.
- ✓ *consubstantial* is Latin for the Greek *homoousios*, wh/ literally means *of the same essence*.
 - ✓ The Son is the same divinity as the Father and is also co-eternal with the Father
- ✓ *Divine simplicity* says that divinity is indivisible, i.e. God does not have parts; the Son cannot be said to be part of God. Each of the three persons of the Trinity is fully God

through him all things were made.

- ✓ Christ is the agent of creation (John 1:3, 2 Cor 8:4-6, Col 1:15-16, Heb 1:1-3); it was through the Word of God that all creation came into existence. Because the F + S are unified in all divine activity, it is just as accurate to say that the Son is Creator as it is to say that the Father is Creator (see CCC 292 wh/ says “Creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity”)

**For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,**

- ✓ Affirms Christ’s pre-existence
- ✓ He is the Son and heir of the Father who “came down” i.e. became human so that salvation could be offered to the human race by God’s merciful invitation to forgiveness, See John 1:14 and Phil 2:6-8. Salvation requires this kind of divine intervention; it is not the product of human effort.

- ✓ Salvation is new life in Christ often expressed as a) *eternal life* – a share in God’s own divine life both now and in the future; b) *forgiveness of sins* – full reconciliation between God and humans; c) *transformation by the Holy Spirit* – as the life-giving presence of the risen Lord, their lives became characterized by the gifts of the HS (see Gal 5:22)

**and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.**

- ✓ The power of God’s HS created the human body of Jesus in the womb of Mary
- ✓ Mary gave birth to the whole person of Christ, including his divine nature (Lk 1:43) wh/ is why it’s appropriate to call Mary “Mother of God.”
- ✓ “became man” really means Christ became truly human wh/ argues against heresies that questioned the full humanity of Jesus.
- ✓ Mary who is open and accepting of God’s ways contrasted w/ Pilate who rejects God’s claims

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,**

- ✓ “for our sake” because it has significance for our salvation; he died for our sins (see Heb 10:1-18, Gal 3:13-14). Jesus dies not by accident but in radical loving obedience to the Father
- ✓ This underscores the fact that Jesus really suffered and really died because he was truly human, refuting heresies that challenge his true humanity

**and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.**

- ✓ This line of the Creed is taken verbatim from 1 Corinthians 15:3-4
- ✓ Jesus’ resurrection was real and bodily, not a ghostly apparition or a metaphor for a spiritual (non-bodily) ascent to heaven
 - ✓ “The resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, ...” CCC 638
 - ✓ “The truth of Jesus’ divinity is confirmed by his Resurrection.” CCC 653
- ✓ “in accordance w/ the scriptures” refers to the fulfillment of OT prophecies in Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection. See John 5:39, Luke 24:25-27 and Isaiah 53

**He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

- ✓ The ascension is a restoration to the prior status of the Son. He ascended from his state of humility and reclaimed divine glory that was originally his from before time (John 17:5, Phil 2:9-11)
- ✓ “the right hand of the Father” conveys shared divine essence and unity of divine power (CCC 663). The Son is unified with the Father’s power and activity, yet remains distinct.
- ✓ The ascension allows Jesus to transcend earthly life in order to be fully present at the Father’s right hand, and to provide for his more intimate and powerful presence in the gift of his “life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor 15:45)

**He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead**

- ✓ Jesus will return, not in humility as he once did, but in glory, since he shares fully in the Father’s life and authority in heaven
- ✓ Jesus as Judge! At the end of time he will preside over the judgment of humanity (Mt 25:31-46)

and his kingdom will have no end.

- ✓ This refers to the promise of an eternal kingdom in 2 Samuel 7
- ✓ The promise originally to David about his political kingdom obviously didn't work out, this promise has now been interpreted to mean that Jesus, a descendent of King David, will reign forever over a spiritual kingdom (see John 18:36)
- ✓ The kingdom is not a geographical place but a relationship characterized by God's power to rule by the law of divine love.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

- ✓ This last section of the Creed was expanded in the Council in 381 to affirm the divinity of the HS. Just as the F + S can rightly be called "Lord" so can the HS. See CCC 202
- ✓ HS is the link between the risen Christ and the Church. Without the HS, the Church is just another organization, rather than the sacrament of God's presence in the world.
- ✓ "Giver of life" specifically refers to the "breath of life" of creation (Gen 2:7, 1:2). Like the F + S, the HS is not created but is in fact Creator (CCC 291)
 - ✓ The HS is equally divine with the F + the S and equally Creator with them.

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

- ✓ Whereas the Son is said to be begotten from the Father, the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son to the Church and to humanity (John 15:26, 16:13-15). This affirms the consubstantiality of the HS w/ the F + S, and clarifies the HS's distinctness.
 - ✓ The HS proceeds/is sent out as the Father's life-giving, sanctifying power
- ✓ In order to fight Arianism which minimized the divinity of the Son, Church leaders added "and the Son" (Filioque) i.e. double procession of the HS. This led to a split between eastern and western Christianity in 1054. See CCC 245-248

who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,

- ✓ Because of the one divine essence shared by the three persons of the Trinity, worshiping the HS is worshiping God. The HS is as much a divine person as the Father + the Son.
- ✓ To glorify God in the NT means more than praise; it means to acknowledge God's presence and power and its claim on humans. Cf. John 14:16. This was experienced by Christians in their recognition that grace comes to them in the gift of the HS and is a share in divine life

who has spoken through the prophets.

- ✓ This affirms the unity of the OT and NT. There's one overall plan of salvation and the three persons of the Trinity have been active all along.
 - ✓ The HS did not make a first appearance at Pentecost!
- ✓ The HS, as both a power and a person, speaks through humans past and present. The Church is called to be animated by the prophetic voice and promptings of the HS

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

- ✓ This final section on the Church logically follows and flows from the articulation and confession of the Holy Spirit.
 - ✓ The Church, by its very nature, is to express the true nature of God revealed in F, S, and HS; especially in terms of mutual love and sharing in a constant, life-giving relationship in service of creation.
- ✓ The four "marks" of the Church are listed: *One* – unified in its teaching and sacraments; *Holy* – created by Christ to be an expression of God's presence in the world; *Catholic* – it is universal or

worldwide; *Apostolic* – founded on the ministry of the apostles, the Church continues its evangelizing mission in the world, guided by apostolic succession and the communion of saints.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins

- ✓ Baptism as a sacrament of initiation is more than a symbol or a ritual – it is a sacrament with saving significance. The baptized person receives grace and enters into a community of those God calls holy.
 - ✓ People are baptized in the name of the Trinity

**and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

- ✓ The Creed ends on a note of hope: our faith affirms that there is life after death and that our identification w/ Christ promises us a share in his eternal inheritance

E. New Vocabulary to Accommodate the Mystery: **Trinity** (*trias*/three, *unitas*/unity), **Homoousios/Consubstantial, Hypostasis/Person, Ousia, Perichoresis, Filioque**

F. The Dogma of the Holy Trinity – CCC 253-256

- The Trinity is One
- The Divine Persons are really distinct from one another
- The Divine Persons are relative to one another

VI. The Trinity in Our Ministry and Spirituality Today

CCC 221 *But St. John goes even further when he affirms that "God is love": God's very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.*

- God is love – 1 John 4:8, 16
- "If we see love, we see the Trinity" St. Augustine
- God as the Dynamism of Love vs. Supreme Being, a Verb rather than a Noun
- *Hypostasis* / Person – refers not to an individual but to a relationship; three relations that constitute one God
- God wants to enter into loving communion with each of us and with all creation. This act of loving reveals the very nature of God. God not only enters into relationship, God is relationship. God is the dynamic love among F, S, and HS; a loving communion that spills over, reaching out and drawing us into the divine life.
- Human beings are created in "the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26), so are called to enter into the Trinity's "eternal exchange of love."
- "The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity." (CCC #236)
- In Society – promoting mutual sharing, giving/receiving, cooperation, equality, interdependence, mutual respect based on human dignity, unity of purpose, and pursuit of peace and harmony among diverse peoples of the world.

- In the Church – Viewing God as the Dynamism of Love helps us remember that God permeates our lives. One’s call to holiness comes in and through the lay person’s life in the world. Every moment of our life is the arena of holiness. Secondly, baptism calls us to share this vision/awareness with others; helping them to see how the love and grace of the Trinity is present and at work in their lives. We don’t bring God to others, God is already there! Our ministry is to remind others of this incredible mystery.
- In marriage and family life – “The primordial model of the family is to be sought in God himself, in the Trinitarian mystery of life.” Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Families* 6

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