

7. The Trinity and Faith

The doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to the Christian faith. The one God is three divine Persons, each having the fullness of the divine nature, who live in a perfect communion of love.

It is crucial for properly understanding what God is like, how He relates to us, and how we should relate to Him.

Key terms:

Person:	Who a being is (divine, angelic, or human); a rational nature that is responsible for actions.
Mystery:	1) A truth of faith that we could not know unless God revealed it; once it is known, it is understandable and reasonable, but is never fully comprehensible. 2) truths that surpass reason's powers and can only be shown to be non-contradictory.
Attribution:	Speaking of the activities of all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity as the activity of only one Person (for example, God the Father as Creator).
Transcendent:	God is beyond all of creation; all ideas and speech about God cannot fully understand or describe Him.
First Cause:	The beginning cause of all things that is itself uncaused; God.
Immanent:	being within the limits of possible experience or knowledge.

The doctrine of the Trinity is rooted in the fact that God came to meet Christians in a threefold figure: (1) as **Creator**, Lord of the history of salvation, Father, and Judge, as revealed in the Old Testament; (2) the Lord, as **Redeemer**, who in the incarnated figure of Jesus Christ, lived among human beings and was present in their midst as the "Resurrected One" who conquered sin and death; and (3) as the Holy Spirit, the **Sanctifier**, whom they experienced as the helper or intercessor in the power of the new life.

Key landmarks in church history regarding the Trinity?

325 A.D. Council of Nicea I	bishops affirmed the full deity of God the Son. (Mt. 16:13)
381 A.D. Council of Constantinople I	First Council to affirm the son as eternally begotten of the father. Historically the first council to affirm the basic tenets of the Trinity. The Council of Constantinople agreed that the Bible taught the deity of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:4; Lk. 1:35).

431 A.D. Council of Ephesus I

Affirmed that Christ had two natures, human and divine. Officially adopted the recently popular doctrine that Mary is "the Mother of God" or the God-bearer (the theotokos). Council of Ephesus declared the 381 A.D. creed is officially the 325 A.D. Nicean Creed.

EXPLANATION

The mystery of God (1Jn. 3:2)

- God is beyond all his creation and cannot be completely comprehended (he is transcendent).
- There are three divine Persons, in one Godhead.
- Since divinity is indivisible, there is one God, not three Gods (Dt. 6:4).
- Without God's direct revelation of the Trinity, this central mystery of the faith is unknowable.

The Father, the first Person of the Blessed Trinity: the Creator (Mal 2:10)

- The Father is an uncreated Being who created all things from nothing; he is the first cause.
- He is a loving Father who continually cares for his people, drawing them to himself in mercy.

The Son, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity: the Redeemer (Jn. 1:1-4)

- In his perfect knowledge of himself, the Father begot his one Word, the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity.
- The Son is not *created* by the Father, but *begotten*; he is the uncreated image of the Father.
- The Son is completely divine and coequal with the Father, and nothing was made without him.
- He became Jesus Christ, taking on a complete human nature while remaining completely divine.
- His sacrifice of his Passion and Death are the fullest sign of the total self-giving nature of God's love.

The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity: the Sanctifier (Rom 5:5)

- In their perfect love for each other, the Father and the Son *spirated* the Holy Spirit. (*Spirated* - the act by or manner in which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father or from the Father and the Son)
- The Holy Spirit is not *created* by the Father and the Spirit, but proceeds from them as an uncreated divine Person.
- The Holy Spirit is completely divine and coequal with the Father and the Son,
- The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God that moved over the waters at creation; he brings about a new creation in each soul through the grace of the sacraments of the Church.

God is love (1Jn. 4:8-16)

- The three Persons live in a perfect communion of self-giving love; they are a family.
- God's nature determines his actions; that is, who God is determines what God does.

- God's actions are completely good and everything he does is from love.
- God, in his love for us, acts in our lives: he is always close to us (he is immanent), yet remains distinct.

FAITH

- Faith is a response to God's revelation.
- Faith is a personal and communal relationship.
- Faith seeks understanding and is a friend of reason.
- Faith is necessary for salvation.
- Faith is a free gift from God.
- Faith is a free human act.
- Faith believes with conviction in a message.

EXPLORE!

Explore with the candidates the implications of being baptised into the Trinitarian life.

The Trinity and Faith— Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. How do we know that there are three Persons in one God?
2. How does God's nature (a community of Persons whose life is love) determine what He does?
3. If they are all equal why does God, the Father, have a title that implies he is above the son and the spirit? (on the basis that a father is always greater than his son and the spirit hardly ever gets referred to as a God)
4. Discuss how each member of the Trinity is involved in creation according to the Scripture? In salvation? In the life of the Church? In my prayer life?
5. Looking at Ephesians 2 :3-14, can you identify what each member of the Trinity does for our salvation?

PRAAYER

Pray The Nicene Creed

or

Gospel Reflection: Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King

Year A Mt. 25:31-46

Year B Jn. 18:33-37

Year C Lk. 23:35-43

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

THE BLESSED TRINITY

Scripture

- Gn. 1:16 God is revealed as a community of Persons.
- Ps. 51:11 Holy Spirit as a loose concept in the Old Testament; as a sign of God's presence and mercy.
- Mt. 3:13-17 The Trinity is revealed at Jesus' Baptism
- Mt. 17:5 The Trinity is revealed at the Mount of Transfiguration.
- Mt. 28:19 The Trinitarian formula for Baptism reveals coequality of the three Persons.
- Lk. 1:30-35 The Trinity is revealed at Jesus' conception.
- Jn. 8:58 Jesus claims divinity by claiming God's name: "I AM".
- Jn. 10:30 Unity of Jesus with the Father.
- Jn. 14:16-17 The Father will give another Advocate to be with us always, the Spirit of truth.
- Jn. 15:26 The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.
- Acts 5:1-11 Lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God.
- 2Cor 13:14 Trinitarian blessing.
- Col. 1:19; 2:9 Each divine person is equally and identically the one true and living God.
- Gal. 4:4-7 The climax of God's work of redemption brings with it the climax of God's triune self-revelation.
- 1Jn. 4:8-16 God is love, and in his love, he sent his Son for our sins and his Spirit to abide with us.
- Eph. 1:3-15 Trinitarian pattern in blessings.

Catechism

- 42, 239 God is transcendent and at the same time immanent.
- 202 Belief in the Trinity is belief in the one, undivided God.
- 232-237 Salvation history is the history of the revelation of the Trinitarian God and how he reconciles to himself those who repent of sin and seek holiness.
- 245-256 Creedal expressions of faith in the Trinity and statements of Trinitarian dogma.
- 258-259 The Trinity works together to accomplish the plan for our salvation, yet each divine Person has a unique role, or work.
- 260 God's ultimate plan is to bring us into unity with him.
- 261 The Trinity is the central mystery of our faith.

(Source: RCIA Catechist's Manual, Association for Catechumenal Ministry, Maryland, 2007)