

Our Triune God

The word “triune” is an unusual word. Literally it means “three-one.” In the world of mathematics this makes no sense: three is not one and one is not three. And yet when we enter into the mystery of God the simple fact is that earthly categories are inadequate to describe his glory.

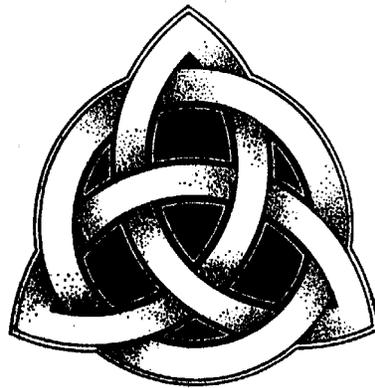
The Trinity

Briefly stated the Christian teaching on the Trinity is this: *The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons: [Father, Son and Holy Spirit]...The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire.* (Catechism, 253). For example Jesus is God. He is not one-third of God. He is God, whole and entire. The Bible says of him, *In him dwells the fulness of divinity* (Col 1:19). If Jesus is God, whole and entire, if the fulness (not just part) of the one and only divine nature dwells in him, this seems to leave nothing left over for the Father or the Spirit. But it remains true also that the Father is God, and the Spirit is God. Just like Jesus, each of them is God, whole and entire. They each possess the one divine nature totally. How can this be? To illustrate the mystery consider this, If there were only one glass of water in the whole universe and I were to drink it all there would be none left for you. But in the Trinity three persons drink fully of the one and only divine nature. The Father drinks fully of the one and only glass of water. This seems to leave nothing left for the Son or the Spirit. Yet the fact remains that both the Son and the Spirit are able and do in fact drink of the same glass of water whole and entire. How this can happen is beyond our experience and ability to understand yet God reveals it to us and asks us to accept it as a true. It is a mystery of our faith in the truest and fullest sense of that word.

The Three Persons

In the course of study we have undertaken we will look at each of the three Persons of the Trinity in some detail. However for now it will be helpful to look

at how they relate to one another in the Trinity. How can we understand the way that Father, Son and Spirit relate to one another? Consider the following.



God the Father’s knowledge of himself is infinitely perfect. As the Father considers himself as he really is he forms a thought or a “word” about himself. This thought is an exact and infinitely perfect representation of all that he is. It is somewhat like when you or I look into a mirror. We see an exact representation of ourselves. But there are important differences from our glancing into a mirror and God’s perfect image and understanding of himself. In the first place, the image we see in the mirror is an image only of our external self. All that lies deep within remains unseen. The second crucial difference is that the image in the mirror is only an image, it is not alive. It is not another “I” who lives. It is only a reflection. But when the Father images or understands himself it is an infinitely complete and perfect thought. Thus, the thought actually has existence since to exist is of the very nature of God. Hence, any perfect image of him must also have existence. We call this perfect thought, the “Word” (Jn 1:1) or the Son. Jesus, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is an absolutely perfect and exact representation of the Father. This is why Jesus is able to say, *He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe*

that I am in the Father and the Father in me? (Jn 14:9-10).

As the Father gazes upon the Son and the Son upon the Father, they behold the very divine nature which they both possess and behold all which is good and true and perfect. They behold one another in infinite and perfect love. This love is more than an abstract love or merely a feeling. It is a living love, a love that also has literal existence as a divine person. We call this love the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the Love of God, he is a person, the very love of the Father for the Son and the very love of the Son for the Father. This is why we say in the Creed, *He proceeds from the Father and the Son.*

Not only does the love with between Father and Son generate the Holy Spirit, the love of the whole Trinity overflows into the work of creation. God did not create the world because he was lonely but because he is Love and wanted to share his glory, love and happiness. *God created all things not to increase his glory but to show it forth and communicate it, for God has no other reason for creating than his love and goodness.* (Catechism, 293).

Thus, as we look at the Trinity we can see the truth that God is love. Every aspect of his being and every mystery about him must be appreciated in the light of this central truth: he is love. As stated, we will look at each of the Persons of the Trinity in more detail in future flyers. But for now, notice how they are in a relationship of love to one another and to creation.

This also says something of us for we are made in the image and likeness of God. Consider yourself for a moment. You are a unique individual, distinguished from every other person who has ever been or ever will be. And yet you are not solitary, you are in community. You share a common humanity with others and are made for relationships with others. Further, just as God’s love bears fruit in

the existence of creation so does our love and cooperation with others bear countless fruits. In this way we can understand that the teaching on the triune nature of God is not merely about abstract formulas and mysteries beyond us, it is about coming to understand very important truths about ourselves.

Other Attributes of God.

We have reflected on the truth that there is only one God, yet that one God is a community of three persons. Though this is the deepest mystery about God, there are other important truths also to mention of Him.

God is Pure Spirit

God is not a material, that is to say, a physical being. He does not have a body. As pure spirit he has an intellect and a will, like us, but unlike us, he has no body. This means that he cannot be seen with our earthly eyes. Of course this does not make him any less real. Things such as thoughts, justice or love cannot be seen but they are still very real and cause very real things to happen. So it is with God. At times the Bible does speak of God as having hands, eyes, arms, a heart and so forth. But these must be understood as figures of speech. They mean that God knows all things, sees all things, hears all things and so on. Thus the Scriptures teach, *God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.* (John 4:24)

God is Infinitely Perfect

God is limitless perfection. Usually when we think of perfection we mean that there is nothing negative, just good. Perfect here means this but also more. It means that God is complete, lacking in nothing, limited in no way. He is like a shoreless, bottomless sea of perfection. Whatever perfections we see in the world such as beauty, truth, or nobility come from God who has these qualities to an infinitely greater degree. In a certain sense we only have a limited knowledge of beauty, truth nobility and so on. Niagra Falls may show us a great example of power and beauty but they provide only a tiny and imperfect glimpse of the awesome power and exquisite beauty of God who is so much more than this world

can ever show.

God is Simple

Ordinarily we do not feel complimented when we are called simple. But when it is used here of God it means that God is undivided and indivisible. God has no parts. He cannot be divided up. He is the same through and through, he is Love.

God is unchangeable

Change involves losing or gaining something. But since God is already a being who already has all possible perfections, there are no new ones for him to gain. The Book of James (1:17) says that in God, *there is no change, nor shadow of alteration.* God did not change when he created the world for he willed to do that from all eternity. Neither does God change in his attitude toward us. Though the scriptures sometimes speak of him as being angry or pleased, jealous or contented, this does not mean that there is change in God. Rather, it is our experience of him that changes based on what we do. Just as the sun may warm and cheer us on a cold winter day, it may also burn and seem punishing in the heat of summer. Yet the sun has not changed. Only our experience of it. So it is with God.

God is Eternal

Eternal does not merely mean without beginning or end, nor does it merely mean a long, long time. Eternal means, the fulness of time. That is to say, past, present and future are all equally present to God at once. God dwells in an eternal, unchanging now. Your past present and future are all equally before God. Everything is always present to him and he controls everything in one eternal thought and act of his will.

God is Omnipresent

Wherever you are, God is. *Do I not fill the heavens and the earth, says the Lord.* (Jeremiah 23:24). Everything is known to him, subject to his power and held together by him. Though too lengthy to reproduce here, psalm 139:7-12 is a beautiful reflection on God's abiding presence.

God is All-Knowing and All-Wise

God's knowledge embraces all things known or knowable, past present and future, all things actual or possible. He also has the wisdom of seeing all things in a unified plan and directed to a goal. His view in a single glance embraces and unites everything. He knows what is to be done in order to carry out every single detail and how to accomplish perfectly what he wills to be done. We may not always understand what God is doing but *we'll understand it better by and by.* God is working his purposes out and in his will is our peace.

God is all powerful.

There's nothing God can't do. He can do all things by a mere act of his will and nothing is hard or impossible for him. He can make a way out of no way.

God is all-good

God is more than good to us. He is goodness in itself. He is simply everything that could be needed or desired. He is the goal of every creature and the fulfillment of every hungry human heart which seeks perfect happiness.

God is All-Holy

There is absolutely no sin or moral imperfection in God. Not only is he all-holy but he is also the source of all holiness. In fact there is no holiness apart from him. All of us who have any holiness at all merely share in the holiness that is already his.

God is All Merciful and All Just.

God is all just in that he gives to every creature what it needs in order to fulfil its appointed role in this world. He faithfully showers on us whatever is necessary to know, love and serve him. We can see therefore how his justice is very related to his mercy. He rewards those who keep his law but punishes those who willfully refuse to keep his ways. Yet even here his punishment is to correct not to destroy and his mercy is always at hand. God is wonderfully patient and merciful to all his children. His mercy and his love endure forever!