

Reflection for the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity

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St. Augustine is one of the most influential thinkers in the history of the Catholic Church and Western Civilization. There is a famous story that when he was the Bishop of Hippo (a diocese located in modern day Algeria), he began to write a book entitled "On the Holy Trinity" (Latin : De Trinitate) that would explain the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Although he was an expert in theology and philosophy, this great bishop was struggling to put the supernatural mystery of God into human words. So to clear his mind, he went for a walk on the beach. While enjoying some peace and relaxation, he noticed that he was alone except for one little boy. The child had dug a hole in the sand, and was going back and forth with a bucket, putting ocean water in the small hole. The curious Augustine approached the boy and asked what he was doing. The child explained that he was trying to put the entire ocean into his little hole in the sand. Augustine laughed and walked away, saying to himself, "that is impossible". As Augustine walked away he heard the boy say out loud, "just like trying to put the mystery of the Trinity into the human mind". When Augustine turned around, the boy was gone.

This weekend the Church celebrates the feast of the Most Holy Trinity – the mystery of God Himself. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, we believe in one God, who is three divine persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For moment today, let us reflect on three things – of course three is the perfect number when speaking about the Trinity!

First, the Trinity is one of the most basic and essential teachings of our faith. Without it, we cannot be Christians. In fact, to believe in one God (who is three persons) makes us stand out from the rest of the world. (1) Some do not believe in God at all - atheists, (2) some believe a divine being may exist but we cannot know anything about it (agnostic), (3) some believe in multiple gods (Greeks / Romans), (4) some believe that there is not one god per say, but that divinity is equally present in all things (Buddhists/Hindus), and some believe one God exists but that one god is not a Trinity (Judaism/Islam). Our faith in the Holy Trinity makes us very different.

Second, how to you explain a mystery ? The apostles taught us – or handed down to us – what Jesus had revealed. Jesus taught us that He and the Father are one (Everything that the Father has is mine), and that He and the Father would send the Holy Spirit to have us share in their own divine life and truth. Jesus also taught the apostles to baptize in the name of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

One of the best teachings on the Trinity came in 325 AD, when the bishops of the church met at the Council of Nicaea to write a creed – a teaching document to answer questions of the day. At that time many converts from the Greek world, who had been schooled in Plato and Aristotle, sought to understand Christianity only in the vocabulary and concepts of philosophical logic. They did not have a background in

scripture. Soon divisions emerged in the church over some of the ways theologians incorrectly tried to explain God only by logic. Seeing the pain caused by these theological errors, the bishops gathered to write a teaching document to ensure that the church was united on the one true Catholic faith. We say this creed at Mass each Sunday, and it is known as the Nicene Creed.

As a foot note to history, there were some famous bishops and scholars at the council (St Athanasius and St. Eusebuis). But the most least remembered was St. Nicolas of Myrna, who we know today as Santa Claus. So next time you pray the Creed, please know that is the best gift Santa ever gave us.

It may sound too simple, but all we need to know about the Trinity is taught each week in the Creed, and when we profess it we profess in union with the church throughout the world, and in union with the church for close to two thousand years. The first part of the Creed testifies to God the Father, who created all things visible and invisible (that which we know and even the things do not yet know). God is eternal and all powerful.

The second part of the Creed speaks of the Son (Jesus). He is God from God, light from light, true God from true God. He is one in being with the Father. The Son is incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is here on earth in flesh and blood, without ever losing His divinity.

Lastly, the Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and Son, and with them is adored and glorified as God. One of the most thought provoking lines is that the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and giver of life”. God gives us life – a share in His own divine life. We use the word Super-natural to describe the life of God, for God is not a creature, who gives us life from creature to creature. God gives us something (super) above natural life and this world. This is the Holy Spirit who comes down from heaven, and gives to us a share in God’s own life - supernatural life.

Third, it is important to remember that the Holy Trinity is not a mystery like we see on TV or the movies. It is not a mystery that the police solve by the end of the show. It is a mystery revealed to us by God Himself. It is an incredible act of love that we should all ponder and reflect upon.

God is the creature and we are the creation. Yet, God took the innovative (He chose to do it) to reveal Himself to us in a way that we could know Him, love Him, and share life with Him. Friendships only take place when one person reveals himself to the other. God offers to us the ability to know our Creator who is all powerful, all knowing, and all loving.

As humans, we cannot love a stranger or someone who is aloof. So God revealed Himself to us so that we could know Him as He is (a trinity), and enter into a real friendship, an intimate relationship with Him – one that would last forever. This revelation of God to His people was done again and again throughout the Old Testament, little by little, and it was brought to a perfect completion by Jesus Christ in the gospels. One such example is when Jesus says, “He who sees me, sees the Father”.

St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas both say that by human reason (intellect) alone, humans can deduce that God exists. But by human reason alone, we cannot know God is a trinity. It was God who took the

initiative to reveal Himself to us. This great feast day we celebrate that we have been invited to know God as He is, and love Him as He is.

When I teach RCIA class on the Trinity, I always say that the Holy Trinity is not a “What” but a “Who”. It is not simply an academic doctrine. Rather it is God who wants us to love Him, and who slowly revealed Himself to us through the natural order, human intellect, and finally through the Old Testament and the gospels. Like any friendship, it begins and goes slowly so that over time, one person is known to the other.

How wonderful that when we begin our life and friendship with God in the great sacrament of baptism, we do so in God’s name – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When we ask for a blessing, it is given by the Church in the name of God Himself – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

How wonderful that when we pray and enter into a private conversation with God, we begin by calling upon His name – the sign of the cross.

Let me end by saying that this great feast of the Holy Trinity should fill us with a sense of awe and wonder. Although we are mere creatures (flesh and blood) and also sinners, God has shown us incredible love and dignity. He invites us to share life with Him and to know Him as He is.

We have a God who is not aloof or cold. Instead, we celebrate that God took the effort to reveal Himself to us – so that we could know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this life, and be with Him forever in heaven. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever Amen.