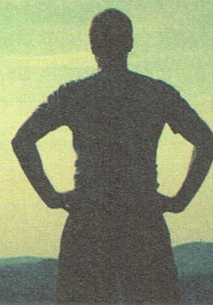


# Journey of Faith



## In Short:



- The Trinity is three persons in one God.
- The Trinity is revealed in Scripture.
- We can relate to each person of God.

## The Holy Trinity

*"The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet they are not three but one God."*

*Athanasian Creed*

Catholics often begin prayers with the sign of the cross and the words: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." By doing so, we express our faith in three divine persons collectively called the Holy or Blessed **Trinity**. This simple yet meaningful prayer connects us to a mystery at the heart of Christian life and belief. In fact, "the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life" (CCC 234).

The Church calls it a **mystery** because three persons in one God is difficult to comprehend. It's not a mystery in the sense some genius or advancement in science will someday solve it. It's a mystery in the religious sense, a deep truth or reality beyond anything we can experience or understand in this world. The heart of the mystery of the Holy Trinity is that "God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange" (CCC 221).

This mystery is like "love" or "grace." As much as God reveals to us, as vivid as our experiences are, we know there's always something more.

We're called to loving communion with others because we are created in God's image. It's often through human relationships that we experience God's love.

- *What relationships have helped you experience God's love?*



## The Trinity in the Bible

Belief in the Trinity has been part of the Christian understanding of God from the beginnings of the Church. Saint Paul wrote in the year 57: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Corinthians 13:13). That greeting recognizes three persons in God.

This mystery of God's life and identity was revealed in Scripture gradually:

1. The Father revealed himself to ancient Israel. In a world that worshiped many gods, he taught the Israelites that he is the one God who created the world. The Old Testament hints at the Trinity. God created the world by his "word" and "breath" (Psalm 33:6). The Word (Son) of God and his life-giving breath (Spirit) are active throughout the Old Testament.
2. Next came the Son, revealed in the Incarnation: "In the beginning was the



Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son" (John 1:1, 14). We celebrate the **Incarnation**: God's coming to dwell with us on earth as the Son (Jesus) in human flesh, at Christmas.

When used to refer to Jesus, "the title 'Son of God' signifies the *unique and eternal* relationship of Jesus Christ to God his Father" (CCC 454, emphasis added). This means that in the very life of God, there is a Father-Son relationship: God "is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternally Father in relation to his only Son" (CCC 240). The Father and Son are so close, they share one divine nature.

3. Finally, the Holy Spirit was sent and revealed. At Jesus' baptism, there is a manifestation of each person of the Trinity: the Son is baptized, the Father speaks, and the Spirit descends like a dove:

*"Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him....After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"*

*Matthew 3:13, 16–17*

As his death was approaching, Jesus began to speak of the promised Spirit he will send after his resurrection (John 14:16–17, 26). Jesus' words are fulfilled when the Spirit is poured out on the Church on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after his resurrection on Easter. On that day, the Spirit is "manifested, given, and communicated as a divine person....On that

day, the Holy Trinity is fully revealed" (CCC 731–732). Sharing in the one divine nature, the Holy Spirit is both the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son (CCC 245).

In the history of salvation, the three persons of the Trinity are revealed in order: Father, Son, and Spirit. In our own spiritual histories, we also come to know each divine person but not always in that order. Some may come to know Jesus first and only later develop a relationship with the Father and the Spirit.

- Which person of the Trinity feels most approachable to you right now? Why? Which person do you look forward to getting to know more about?



## Speaking of God: A Vocabulary of Faith

A good way to learn what Catholics believe is to look at the words of our prayers. The Nicene Creed, an important statement of our beliefs, spells out our belief in the three persons in one God:

- It begins by saying that we "believe in one God"—one being, one consciousness, one will, one mind, a single, infinite, all-powerful, divine reality. The Church uses terms such as "substance," "essence," and "nature" to describe this oneness (CCC 252–253). God's goodness and power is shared in three persons. Each **person** is complete and distinct from the others yet wholly and eternally God.



- “The Father almighty” is “maker of heaven and earth.” We see the Father as the Creator and cause of everything.
- Jesus is “the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.” This means that the Son *always* was. Both Father and Son have existed from the beginning and have been in the closest of relationships: “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30).
- The Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son.” The Spirit issues from them both—together and eternally, *not after* in time or in order.

The words “begotten” and “proceeds” both convey energy, movement, and power, in the context of unity, equality, and love. Seeing a dynamic relationship among equals is key to understanding the Trinity.

### An Image of the Trinity

Any attempt to visualize the Trinity is going to be limited and imperfect because God is more than we can fully understand. However, the shield of the Trinity, though imperfect, may help.

The points of the triangle represent *who* God is: the three persons. The Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Father; and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son (CCC 254).

Father, Son, and Spirit are one in what they are but distinct in who they are.



## The Work of the Trinity

*“Inseparable in what they are, the divine persons are also inseparable in what they do.”*

CCC 267

Each person of the Trinity works in common with the others in every divine action. All the saving work of God proceeds from the Father, through the Son, toward completion in the Spirit. The goal of the Trinity in creation and history is to unite human beings with the love of the triune God (CCC 260). We receive this call to share in a life of divine love “by the grace of Baptism ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’” (CCC 265). Saint Paul beautifully expresses this experience of grace:

*“When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...to ransom [us]...so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”*

Galatians 4:4–6



Using the Bible passages below, find names, roles, or characteristics for each person of the Trinity.

### God the Father

Matthew 19:4 \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 8:15 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 1:3 \_\_\_\_\_

### God the Son

Matthew 1:23 \_\_\_\_\_

John 1:14 \_\_\_\_\_

John 10:11 \_\_\_\_\_

### God the Spirit

Matthew 3:16 \_\_\_\_\_

John 15:26 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 2:1-4 \_\_\_\_\_

## Praying to the Trinity

Through prayer to each divine person, we enter into an experience of the Trinity that overcomes our limited ability to grasp this mystery.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola offers an easy yet powerful method of prayer that can help us grow in our relationship with the Trinity. He encourages us to end each time of prayer or meditation with a conversation in which we speak to each divine person in short, spontaneous, heartfelt phrases, much like a friend speaking to a friend:

1. First, speak to the Father whatever is on your heart, expressing your gratitude, sharing your needs and worries.
2. Then speak to Jesus in the same way.
3. Finally, speak to the Spirit, asking for help and guidance.

In your journal, write three short prayers using the prompts below:



*Dear Heavenly Father...*

*Dear Jesus, my Lord and Savior...*

*Come, Holy Spirit, help me...*

Try to begin and end each day this week with a short prayer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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