

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The Trinity comprises three persons in one God.
- The Trinity is revealed through Scripture.
- Through the Trinity, you have a relationship with each person.



The Holy Trinity

Do you know someone who's never seen without his or her "other half," no matter what? A pair who, when you think about one, the other person always comes to mind? Is it a couple? Best friends? Siblings? Whatever the relationship, these two share a lot of similar traits. They probably have the same interests and hobbies, use the same expressions, think the same way, they may even look alike! They're also probably together a lot, too. In fact, they may only be so similar because they care about each other and spend time together.

While this isn't the same as God in the Trinity, the three in one, these kinds of relationships help us better understand—in human terms—this mystery of faith and the love they share. Because we are created in the image of God, we are able to enter into communion with others (CCC 357). It is often through our human relationships—in marriage, family, church, or the wider human community—that we experience the love of God.

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



God Is Love

What was God doing before he created the world? The answer can be found in the doctrine of the **Holy Trinity**. The *Catechism* captures the heart of this mystery in one short phrase: "God is one but not solitary" (CCC 254). There is truly only one God, but even before the creation of the universe, this one God was three persons, eternally united in a communion of love. God was not, is not, and never will be lonely or bored, for he is eternally loving: the Father loving the Son, the Son loving the Father, and the Spirit proceeding from and sharing in that love.

Within its own divine being, the Trinity is a loving union. The Apostle John declares, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). "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" (CCC 221).

Revelation of the Trinity

This inner secret of who God is was not revealed all at once, but gradually, step by step. Like children moving from grade to grade toward high school, humanity was led slowly toward a fuller knowledge of God.

The Catechism quotes the fourth-century Church father St. Gregory of Nazianzus:

"The Old Testament proclaimed the Father clearly, but the Son more obscurely. The New Testament revealed the Son and gave us a glimpse of the divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us and grants us a clearer vision of himself....By advancing and progressing 'from glory to glory,' the light of the Trinity will shine in ever more brilliant rays."

CCC 684

Step One

First the Father revealed himself to ancient Israel in the Old Testament. In a world that worshiped many gods and goddesses, he taught the ancient Israelites that he was the one and only God who created and rules the world. Even in the Old Testament, however, there were hints of the Trinity. The one God created the world "by the breath of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6). The Word (or Wisdom) of God and his life-giving Spirit (or Breath) were active in the Old Testament but not yet recognized as divine persons.

Step Two

Next in this progressive unfolding was the revelation of the Son. The Gospel of John begins with the eternal divine Word:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

John 1:1

The Old Testament spoke of God's activity in the world in terms of his living and active Word. This Word has been revealed as God's eternal Son:

"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, full of grace and truth."

John 1:14

We celebrate the Incarnation, God's becoming flesh and coming to dwell with humanity in the person of Jesus, at Christmas. God is like a father to all creation, but Jesus is the Son in a unique way. The title "Son" of God means that God is not merely "Father" as Creator but in the very life of God there is an eternal Father-Son relationship: Jesus said, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). The Son and Father are so close they share the one divine nature.

Step Three

The final step is the revelation of the Holy Spirit. In the Son, we begin to glimpse the Spirit. At the baptism of Jesus, there is a manifestation of each person of the Trinity. The Son is baptized. The Father speaks. The Spirit descends as a dove. As Jesus approaches the cross, he begins to speak to his disciples of the promised Spirit he will send (John 14:16–17, 26). Yet the Spirit remains something of a mystery to the apostles until the day of Pentecost. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is "manifested, given, and communicated as a divine person...On that day, the Holy Trinity is fully revealed" (CCC 731–732).



In the history of salvation, the three persons of the Trinity are revealed in order: Father, Son, and Spirit. In our own lives, there is often a similar process, but we don't always come to know one divine person after another in that same order. Some people come to know Jesus first and later develop a relationship with the Father. It can be difficult to grasp that the Spirit is a divine person. Through prayer, we can come to know the Trinity as a personal presence who guides and helps us.

- How would you describe your relationship to each person of the Trinity? Who did you come to know first: Father, Son, or Spirit?



- Which relationship needs the most growth?

Speaking of God: Trinitarian Vocabulary

The ancient Church Fathers and early councils of the Church developed a basic vocabulary to express the mystery of God as one and three. While this mystery is really beyond words, it helps to have a place to start when we're trying to tell others—or just explaining it to ourselves.

Substance: Terms like “substance, essence or nature” describe what God is (CCC 253). They point to a single, infinite, all-powerful, all-holy divine reality, which is God. If asked, “What is God?” we answer in the singular: “God is one divine substance, nature, or essence.”

Person: The word “person” speaks of who God is. If asked, “Who is God?” we answer in the plural: “God is three divine persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

Relation: That which distinguishes one person from another. The Father's relation to the Son is described as an eternal generation or begetting. The Father shares his divinity with the Son. The Son is related to the Father as the eternal and only begotten Son, wholly receiving his divine nature from the Father, like “light from light.” The Spirit eternally proceeds from the union of Father and Son as their love. “It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds” (CCC 254).

Responding to the Love of the Trinity

The goal of the Trinitarian actions in creation and history is to bring human beings to share in their love. “By the grace of Baptism ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’ we are called to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity” (CCC 265). Saint Paul 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

One special place where we encounter this activity and experience our relationship to the Trinity is the celebration of the Mass. In the Eucharist, we turn toward the Father in praise and thanksgiving. Our praise to the Father is offered in union with the Son and his perfect sacrifice offered on the cross. The priest asks the Holy Spirit to come upon our gifts of bread and wine and transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ. He also asks in prayer for the Holy Spirit to unite us to God and one another as the living body of Christ (CCC 1082, 1110).

We also grow closer to the Trinity through prayer. You can try ending every prayer with a brief conversation with each person of the Trinity like you're talking to a friend.



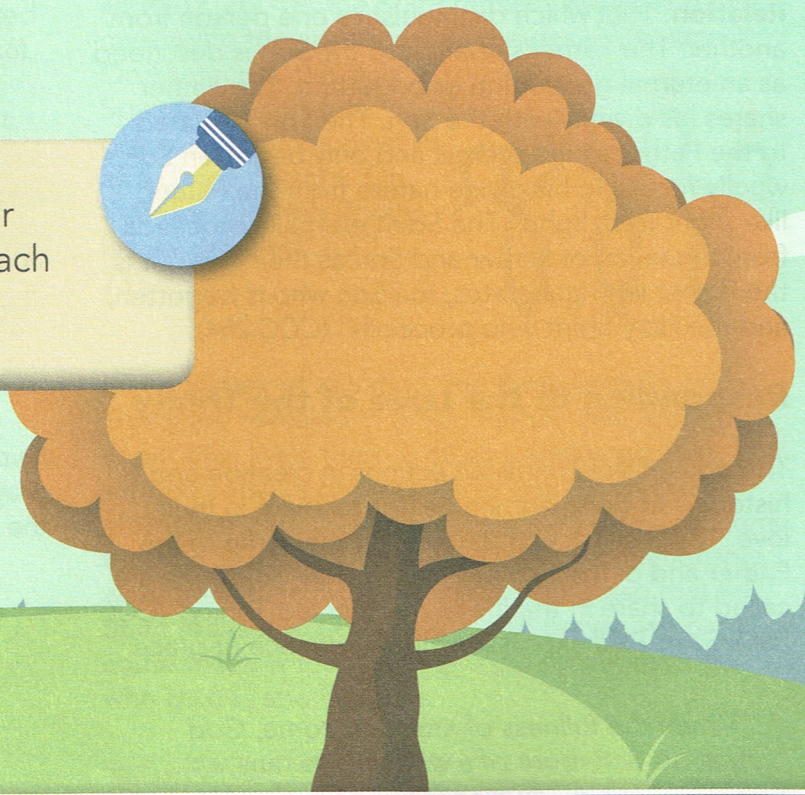
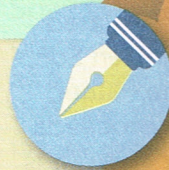
If you don't feel comfortable with spontaneous prayer yet, here are some other traditional prayers to the persons of the Trinity you can try on your own:

- The Our Father and Glory Be, also known as the Doxology
- The Jesus Prayer
- Come, Holy Spirit

Test your Trinitarian vocabulary by filling in the blanks:

- Father, Son, and Spirit are one _____ .
- Father, Son, and Spirit are three _____ .
- Father, Son, and Spirit are distinguished by their _____ .
- God is one _____ in three _____ who live in eternal _____ with each other.

Write a short prayer, letter, or poem or draw a picture to each person of the Trinity.



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