

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

St. Matthew 28:16-20

The Church celebrates today the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity; that is, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. What we are celebrating, however, is a mystery. Now a mystery doesn't mean something which is unknown or insolvable but rather a truth which has been revealed by God that could not be known by reason alone. In other words, it is something which demands both faith and reason. So as the great theologians of the Church have sought to understand the mystery of God, they had no choice but to invent a new word: "Trinity". The word "trinity" is made up two words: "tri" and "unity" meaning the "three-oneness" of God.¹

As we are taught in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons" (n. 253), so we say God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The problem we have is that many people only really think of the Father as being God and when they say "God" they often mean the Father. And they think of Jesus as the Son of God but not really God. And when it comes to the Holy Spirit, most people don't really know what to think. But the truth is the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. But there are not three Gods but only one God.

When we say the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we are talking about Persons, so we say three Persons in one God. The problem, again, that we have is that the word "Person" is a philosophical word and it does not mean the same thing it means when we talk of ourselves or other people as "persons". When we talk about the Trinity being three Persons, we really mean three ways of God expressing Himself.

¹ Pope, Charles. "Trinity Sunday: 'Glory Be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit'" in *National Catholic Register* (2 June, 2023) (ncregister.com).

One way to think of it is like this—although this is not a perfect example and like all attempts to give examples it is incomplete. But the way I try to explain the three Persons in one God to children is like this. I am an individual and there is only one of me but sometimes I express myself in my thoughts, sometimes in my words, and sometimes in my actions. Now when I have a thought it doesn't mean that the rest of me is not tied up with that thought. So maybe we could say that God the Father is the thought or the mind of God, God the Son is the speaking or the Word of God, and God the Holy Spirit is the action or movements of God.

The problem with this and many examples is that to understand what it means to say three Persons in one God we end up dividing God up. We tend to do this, also, when we speak of God as the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sanctifier and we say that God the Father is the Creator, God the Son is the Redeemer and God the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier. We do this to help us make sense of something which, in this life, will always be beyond our minds. But that doesn't mean we don't keep trying to understand, because the more we try, the closer we come to know God.

If we look at the Bible we see that it is filled with the idea of the Trinity. Think of the book of Genesis when God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness" (1:26). Here God speaks of Himself in the plural using "us" and "our". So in the beginning, God already tells us that He is a communion of Persons. Moreover, throughout the Old Testament the word for God in Hebrew is often given as *Elohim*. The word itself is plural meaning "Gods" but has a singular meaning; much like as in English when we say "news" or "maths". Here again, God is referred to using a word which is both plural and singular. And then when God appeared to Abraham it says: "[Abraham] looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, 'My Lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your

servant” (*Gen.* 18:2-3). Here the language uses both singular and plural words but all referring to God. It says Abraham saw “them”, Abraham met “them”, but then it says Abraham called them “Lord”, which is singular.

In the New Testament, we have the clearest expression of the Trinity when Our Lord, giving the mission of the Church to His Apostles says: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*Mt.* 28:19). Apart from this clear annunciation of the Trinity, it is interesting to read that Our Lord doesn’t say to baptise in the “names” of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but only in the “name” of them. And throughout the New Testament Our Lord speaks of the unity of Himself and the Father when He says things like, “The Father and I are one” (*Jn.* 10:30) or “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (*Jn.* 14:11).

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 Holy Trinity, here on earth in faith, and after death in eternal light (cf. Paul VI, *Solemni hac liturgia*, n. 9). So we are each called to live a life in communion with one another, and above all, in communion with God. It is the way in which God created the universe and all that exists—to live in relation to everything else. In the vast expanse of the universe the planets exist in relation to the stars which exist in relation to the galaxies. And even in the tiniest and unseen of creation, atoms bond together to form molecules and so to form compounds and so to make the stuff of life. Even Man himself was created to be in relation. For in Genesis God says, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (2:18). And as the truth that God created us to be in relation with Him, Our Lord says, “know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (*Jn.* 14:20).

This is why sin is never private but tears at each of us and against God, whether we know it or not. And this is why the good that we do, the sacrifices that we make, the prayers that we pray are never in vain because we are in

relation to one another and in communion with God who, as St. Paul writes, is “one God...who is above all and through all and in all” (*Eph.* 4:6).