

The Blessed Trinity

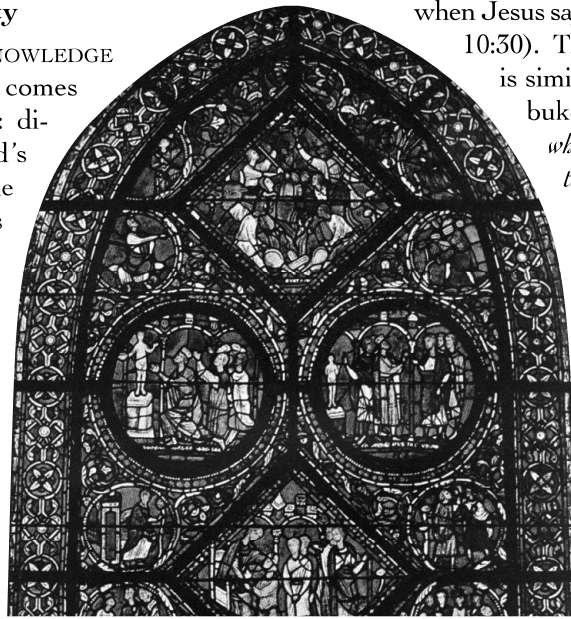
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. ~ 2 Corinthians 13:14

The Revelation of the Trinity



OUR AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE of the Blessed Trinity comes from a reliable source: divine Revelation, God's own revealing of himself. The existence of the Trinity is hinted at in the Old Testament of the Bible and boldly proclaimed in the New Testament. Three events in the life of Jesus show us the Trinity: his conception, his baptism, and his Transfiguration. When the angel came to Mary to invite her to be the Mother of God, Mary understandably asked how it was possible. Gabriel replied: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God"* (Lk 1:35). At Jesus' baptism, the Heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended upon him accompanied by the voice of the Father saying: *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (Mt 3:17; see also Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22). During his public ministry, shortly before he began his final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus took the apostles Peter, James, and John to a high mountain where he was transfigured before them. His appearance was transformed, his clothes became dazzling white, and with him appeared Moses and Elijah, symbolizing the Law and the Prophets — that, is the entire Old Testament. In the course of this astounding event — which, for a moment, revealed Jesus' own divine glory — a cloud, representing the Holy Spirit, overshadowed the three apostles, and a voice once again proclaimed: *"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"* (Lk 9:35).

The Godhead of the Son is directly revealed



Vibrant stained glass in the Cathedral of Chartres, France, dating from the 13th century

when Jesus says: *"I and the Father are one"* (Jn 10:30). The Godhead of the Holy Spirit is similarly revealed when Peter rebukes a fellow Christian: *"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ...? You have not lied to men but to God"* (Acts 5:3-4). And Jesus himself reveals the relationship of the Father and the Spirit: *"But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father; he will bear witness to me"* (Jn 15:26). Finally, Jesus' commission to his apostles at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew reveals plainly that the three Persons belong to a single Godhead: *"baptizing ... in the name of the Father*

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Jesus uses the singular "name," not "names," to show us that all three Persons are one God.

The Relationship of the Three Persons to One Another

The Father totally and eternally gives himself to the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Son gives himself totally and eternally to the Father and the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit likewise gives himself totally and eternally to the Father and the Son. The Son of God is eternally begotten, not made, by the Father as his Word, "his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely"¹ (CCC 102; see also CCC 241). The expression of the love between the Father and the Son is so real that a third person, the Holy Spirit, proceeds from them both; the Holy Spirit's name gives rise to the understanding that he is the "spiration," that is, the "breath" of the Father

"The Trinity is a family of persons whose life is love."

¹ Cf. Hebrews 1:1-3

and the Son (see CCC 246). Hence, in his intimate life, *“God is love”* (1 Jn 4:8, 16); *God is self-giving*. God is a communion of love. *The Trinity is a family of persons whose life is love*. And who God is informs — that is, determines — what God does. He wants us to know him not as a blind and anonymous force but as a family of persons that knows and loves us infinitely. This divine family desires our total happiness and wants to dwell within us. As Jesus said: *“If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”* (Jn 14:23).

The “Works” of Each Person of the Blessed Trinity

The actual distinction among the three divine persons is in their relation to one another. Divinity cannot be shared or divided up. Each of the divine persons is God, whole and entire. Although the divine persons are inseparable in what they are and do, it is possible and common to identify “works” that are proper to each. This is most evident in the way our salvation was accomplished. In his plan born of love, God created us to share his life forever. Sin, however, cut us off from God and from our destiny. Nevertheless, in his great mercy, the Father did not put an end to us or abandon us (see Neh 9:31). *“[W]hen the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman”* (Gal 4:4), to reveal his plan, to show us how to live, and to pay the price for our sins. When this was accomplished, the Holy Spirit came to activate the new and eternal life won for us by Christ’s redemptive self-giving (see Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit empowers and guides the Church to fulfill her mission to preach the Good News of salvation to the whole world and to make God’s life available to all men and women, without exception.

The Trinity as Mystery

The Blessed Trinity, three persons in one God, is a profound mystery. Because it reveals who God is *in his inmost being, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity “is the central mystery of Christian faith and life”* (CCC 234; italics added). This mystery is not illogical,



Baptism of a young child

“The mystery of the Blessed Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life.”

contradictory, or unreasonable, nor is it opposed to belief in the one God. A “mystery” — a reality we cannot fully comprehend — implies neither falsehood nor contradiction; it merely signifies a lack of comprehensibility. In such cases as the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation (the “enfleshment” of the second person of the Trinity as Jesus Christ), we humans with finite minds try to understand a divine and,

therefore, an infinite reality. Our minds are wonderful creations but are still limited. A blind person must take it on faith when we say that the light in the kitchen is on. Throughout life, we are obliged because of our limitations to accept things on the testimony of reliable sources. Reason alone could never conceive of the reality of three persons in one nature, nor for that matter, of one person, Jesus Christ, having two natures (divine and human).

But all our human capabilities, aided by God’s supernatural Revelation, do not enable us to grasp or comprehend the mysteries of the Infinite such as the Blessed Trinity. We will, in this life, only be able to *“see in a mirror dimly”* (1 Cor 13:12). The whole of our supernatural knowledge, just because it is of the very nature of *supernatural*, is beyond us. We experience in these matters an insufficiency, a sense of sad resignation. We feel inadequate, left out — and *this is right*.

We have, therefore, Heaven to look forward to and work toward. Our faith, as Christ himself so often emphasized, is of central importance to our lives (see Mt 21:21-22; Lk 7:50; Jn 3:16). Our faith gives us the strongest, most certain assurance that the world of the supernatural is not an empty dream. Our faith convinces us that the Trinity of God the Father who made us out of love, God the Son who came among us to save us out of love, and God the Holy Spirit who infuses us with love and who sustains us in the Church will be revealed to us at the very hour Jesus opens his arms to welcome us into Heaven with the words: *“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Mt 25:34). This Kingdom is God’s Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Blessed Trinity — our *true home*.

(CCC 102, 232-260)