The Most Holy 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 COR 13:13



Before we begin…

- It was a long road for the Church to come to understand what we do of the Trinity
- This is the "central mystery of the Christian faith" – see CCC 232-234
- "Traces" of this mystery revealed in creation and in the Old Testament
- Fully revealed in the New Testament by Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit : "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." – Mt 11:27
- St. Augustine – No area of study more difficult and in danger of error; no area of study more fruitful and rewarding

The Tri-unity

- First
  - There is only one God – one divine nature, being, essence or substance
    - Nature – "what" a thing is; that *by which* one acts
- But…
  - Three Persons fully and completely possess that divine nature; they do not "share" or divide it – there are no parts or division in God!
    - Person – a subject of action; "who"
  - Not a contradiction: God is one and three at the same time but in *different ways*

Procession in God

- Procession means “to come forth”
- There is an internal procession in God, namely, His concept or idea of Himself
  - This belongs to the intellect, whereby the act remains within the agent (i.e., a concept)
  - Concepts proceed from the knowledge of something within the intellect
    - Ex: when you think of an apple, your intellect forms the concept of “apple”
- Christ said, “I proceeded and came forth from God” – John 8:42

Types of Acts

- Immanent Acts
  - Thinking is therefore an *immanent* act, or an act whose result is within the agent
    - The act of your thinking, as well as your thoughts, ideas, and concepts, are within you
- Transient Acts
  - Acts with results outside of an agent are said to be *transient*
    - Talking, running, typing, jumping, etc.

The Generation of the Word

- God, upon knowing Himself, generates a perfect Idea or Thought of Himself, which is the Word
  - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." – John 1:1
- He is called the Word (Greek, *Logos*) because He is the Father's perfect Idea of Himself, as a mental word or concept expresses that which it represents
- Because God knows Himself perfectly, and this Word that proceeds from Him fully expresses Him, the Word is all that God is – eternal, personal, infinite, etc.

The Father and the Son

- The First Person is called the Father because He alone is "of Himself" or without origin; He has no origin at all
- The Second Person, though eternal, has an origin in that He proceeds ("comes forth") from the Father; in addition to Word, He is also called the Son because He is the perfect likeness of the Father, like how a son is in the image of his father
  - "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God." – John 8:42
  - "He is the image of the invisible God" – Col 1:15
- The Father is the origin or principle of the Son, but He is not His cause; the Son is eternal and has no cause, so you cannot say the Son was caused, formed, made, or created – He is not creature!

The Son

- The procession of the Son from the Father is called generation
- The Son is "born of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten, not made…" – Nicene Creed, 325 A.D.
- He is all that the Father is except Father; He has the entire divine nature as much as the Father has it
- The only difference is that He has it as received, whereas the Father has it as unreceived
  - The Father communicates the divine nature to the Son
- But it is the same divine nature – "consubstantial with the Father" (of the same substance)
- Just like an idea is in the mind and nature of the thinker, so the Word is in the same nature as the Father

The Father and the Son

- Distinct in Person, one in Essence
  - "I and the Father are one." – John 10:30
    - One what?
    - One "what."
- St. Augustine: if they are one, they are not separate. If there is both a Father and a Son, they are distinct.



Procession Again

- Is there another procession in God?
  - Yes, besides the intellect, intellectual beings also possess a will, which is also capable of an immanent act, that being love.
  - “The operation of the will involves another procession, that of love, whereby the object loved is in the lover.” – St. Thomas Aquinas
- Are there more processions after that?
  - “No, procession in an intellectual nature terminates in the procession of the will.” - Aquinas

The Procession of the Holy Spirit

- See CCC 243-244
- The Father and the Son *spirate* (breathe forth) the Holy Spirit as their mutual love
- The Third Person proceeds from both the First and Second Person as from one principle – "who proceeds from the Father and the Son"
- This procession is by way of love, and since love is an impetus or movement of the will toward the Beloved, this procession is called *spiration* (from the word for spirit, which also means breath, motion, impulse) and not generation



The Procession of the Holy Spirit

- "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things." – John 14:26
- "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." – John 15:26
- See CCC 246
- The Council of Florence infallibly defined that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and defended the addition of the *Filioque* to the Creed

The Unity of the Three Persons

- All three Persons fully possess the one divine nature; all three Persons are completely one with that nature
- Therefore, all three Persons are completely one with each other and dwell within each other
- This is called circumincession – the mutual indwelling of the three Persons within one another
- Where one Person is, all three are
- “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me” – John 14:11

The Distinction of the Persons

- The Persons are truly distinct from one another by their *opposing relations*, or relations of origin
- The Father is distinct from the Son because He is His origin; the Son is distinct from the Father because He proceeds from Him; the Spirit is distinct from both because He proceeds from the Father and the Son
- In short, the Persons are distinct from one another because of their *relations*
- See CCC 252

The Dogma of the Holy Trinity

- See CCC 253-255
- Because they are inseparable, all three Persons act together in everything outside the divine nature, or in the external works of God (the "divine economy")
  - Theology refers to it as God's *ad extra* operations
  - "The whole divine economy is the common work of the three divine persons. For as the Trinity has only one and the same nature, so too does it have only one and the same operation" – CCC 258
- We attribute certain titles to the Persons to help us understand their distinction, even though all three Persons act together in everything outside of God's nature; this is called *appropriation*
  - The Father = Creator
  - The Son = Wisdom of God
  - The Holy Spirit = Sanctifier

The Implications for Us

- God is one but not solitary; He is a Communion of Persons in an infinite exchange of love and He has invited us to share in that life and love
- We are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and brought into the life of grace in the name of the Trinity
- "The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity" – CCC 260
- This begins now through grace in which the Persons live in us
  - "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." – John 14:23
  - This is called the *divine indwelling* – the presence of the Holy Trinity in a soul in the state of grace

Summary

- One God
- Two Processions
  - Son from Father – Generation, or by way of knowledge
  - Spirit from Father and Son – Spiration, or by way of love
- Three Persons (all co-equal, co-eternal)
- Four Relations
  - Father to Son – Paternity
  - Son to Father – Filiation (Sonship)
  - Father and Son to Spirit – Common Spiration
  - Spirit to Father and Son – Procession