

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity – Cycle C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

Introduction

The dogma of the Trinity has not always been clearly defined. In fact, the word “Trinity” does not appear in Holy Scripture (neither does the word “pope,” “purgatory,” or “catholic” for that matter; as our fundamentalist brothers and sisters will be quick to point out). It is not even clear how the doctrine was understood in the time of the apostles. Through the first century of Christianity, the Church grew in its awareness of the mystery of the Trinity. The oldest doctrinal formulation of the Church’s belief in the Trinity is in the Apostle’s Creed, which, in the form of the ancient Roman baptismal symbol, served as the basis of catechumenal instruction and as a baptismal confession of faith since the 2nd century.

In the early Church Christians began to ponder the mystery of God’s unity and the Trinity and attempted to explain more precisely the relationships among the persons of the Trinity. The use of the term “Trinity” (Greek: *trias*) first appeared in the 2nd century in the writings of Theophilus of Antioch. The efforts to explain the relationships among the persons of the Trinity led to many errors in the early years, and most of those who tried to describe the relationships ended in heresy. Even the great theologians Tertullian and Origen stumbled into error in their attempts to explain the relationship between the Father and the Son. Arius, around the year A.D. 300, concluded that the Word (logos) of God was created by the Father to be the instrument of all other creation. The Word, the Son of God, was a perfect creature to Arius, but a creature nonetheless. Were this account true, then only the Father would be truly God, and the Son and Holy Spirit would then be divine only through adoption by the Father. In such a case, the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity would become merely a descending hierarchy with the Father extending His grace to the Son and the Holy Spirit, rather than a communion of co-equal and co-eternal persons, who together are the one, true God. The First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) was convened to answer the heresy of Arianism and that council clearly stated the “consubstantiality” of the Son with the Father. The First Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) affirmed that the Spirit must be adored and glorified together with the Father and the Son. Arianism finally died out almost 500 years later at the end of the 7th century but it has been revived in the teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons.

It wasn’t until the Second Council of Constantinople (A.D. 553) that the dogma of the Trinity was clearly enunciated and its technical expression was fixed.

The creed which we call the Nicene Creed, originated at the First Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 and was further amplified by the First Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. It was probably introduced into the western liturgy by the regional Council of Toledo in A.D.

589. That text, however, was a Latin translation of the Greek original and included a small addition which resulted in major theological disputes, namely, that the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father and the Son, rather than only from the Father. This matter continues to divide Catholic and Protestant Christians from Eastern Orthodox Christians.

1st Reading - Proverbs 8:22-31

The concept of wisdom is elusive because it is exceedingly complex. Wisdom can stand for the skill of a craftsman, such as that possessed by those who made Aaron’s vestments (Exodus 28:3) or by the carpenters who constructed the Mosaic tabernacle (Exodus 31:3-5; 36:1). It denotes the ability of a professional mourner (Jeremiah 9:17) or a sailor (Psalm 107:27). The sage is an adviser to kings (Jeremiah 50:35; Proverbs 31:1) but is also an astute old woman (2 Samuel 20:16). It also has an intensely religious aspect: fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7; Sirach 1:9-10). Today we hear it being described as from God (divine) and absolutely prior to the visible universe. This priority implies superiority to all created things.

[Thus says the wisdom of God:]²² “The LORD possessed me,

The verb *qana* generally means “to acquire;” here the connotation is acquisition by way of birth. The rendering “the Lord created me” occasioned serious difficulty with the Arians, who used this text to support the created Logos.

the first-born of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago;²³ From of old

Hebrew has no word for eternity, but *olam* (translated here as “from of old”) signifies an indefinite period of time.

I was poured forth,

This is an image of birth.

at the first, before the earth.²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains or springs of water;²⁵ Before the mountains were settled into place, before the hills, I was brought forth;²⁶ While as yet the earth and the fields were not made, nor the first clods of the world.²⁷ “When he established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep;²⁸ When he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth;²⁹ When he set for the sea its limit, so that the waters should not transgress his command;³⁰ Then was I beside him

Wisdom witnessed all the creation and came to know its secrets.

as his craftsman,

Amon is either “craftsman” or “little child.” Little child fits the earlier birth imagery.

and I was his delight day by day, Playing before him all the while, ³¹ playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the sons of men.

2nd Reading - Romans 5:1-5

The Letter to the Romans is the only writing of Paul’s which is addressed to a church (congregation) which he did not establish. It does not answer questions posed by the congregation or even provide a summary of Christian doctrine. Rather, it presents his missionary reflections on the possibility of salvation now offered to all men, vice only the Jews, in the Good News of Christ Jesus. Paul realizes that man’s justification and salvation depend not on the “deeds of the law” but on faith in Christ Jesus, the Son whom the Father’s love did not spare (as compared to Isaac). Through faith man shares in the effects of the plan of salvation conceived by the Father and brought to realization in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Today we hear him allude to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity love).

5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,

Paul spends Romans 1:16 through 4:25 establishing that the justification of human beings is through faith in Christ Jesus. He is now beginning to discuss the Christian experience in itself. Before moving on, it might be important to define justification. It is the process by which a sinner is made righteous, pure and holy before God. Justification in the Catholic tradition comes about by means of faith in Christ, and in a life of good works lived in loving response to God’s invitation to believe. Against classical Lutheran doctrine, Catholic faith holds that faith without good works is not sufficient to merit justification, for good works show one’s willingness to cooperate with the initiatives of grace. What is necessary for salvation is a faith that represents itself both externally through acts and internally through faith. “A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). One does not earn a place in heaven by doing good works rather than by the grace of God which is the Pelagian heresy which was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431. The biggest difference in the understanding of justification between the Catholic and the Protestant is that the Catholic takes the word to mean the lifelong process which the Christian undergoes – a process that starts with faith and is lived out. The Protestant, on the other hand, takes justification to be God’s external pronouncement that the sinner is regarded as righteous in His sight, thus marking the beginning of the Christian life. It is faith that sustains the Protestant after this beginning.

“Let no one say to himself: ‘If [justification] is from faith, how is it freely given: If faith merits it, why is it not rather paid than given?’ Let the faithful man not say such a thing; for, if he says: ‘I have faith, therefore I merit justification,’ he will be answered: ‘What have you

that you did not receive?' If, therefore, faith entreats and receives justification, according as God has apportioned to each in the measure of his faith, nothing of human merit precedes the grace of God, but grace itself merits increase, and the increase merits perfection, with the will accompanying but not leading, following along but not going in advance." [Saint Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 417), *Letter to Paulinus of Nola* 186,3,10]

we have peace with God

The first effect of justification is peace. Reconciliation replaces estrangement.

through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection we are made children of God. Through the Eucharist, the resurrected Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, we join in the family meal and share in the resurrection.

² through whom we have gained access (by faith) to this grace in which we stand,

Faith is the introduction to the life of justification. Notice that to this point we have been addressing the first theological virtue, faith.

and we boast in hope of the glory of God.

The second effect of our justification is hope, the second theological virtue.

³ Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions,

Divine favor, as the basis of Christian hope, is mighty enough to give confidence even in the face of hardships that might tend to separate human beings from Christ's love (see Romans 8:35).

knowing that affliction produces endurance,

"Consider how great the things to come are, when we can rejoice even at things which appear to be distressful. ... Sufferings are in themselves a good thing, insofar as they prepare for endurance." [Saint John Chrysostom (A.D. 391), *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans* 9]

⁴ and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint,

The hope of God's glory is not an illusion; it is founded on God's love for human beings. The Christian will never be embarrassed by a disappointed hope; human hope can deceive but not that which is of God (see Psalm 25:19-22).

because the love of God

Not our love of God, but God's love of us.

has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is not only the proof but also the medium of the outpouring.

Gospel - John 16:12-15

All through the season of Easter our Gospel reading was from Jesus' final discourse to His disciples; today is no different. The setting is at the Last Supper in the upper room.

¹² AI have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. ¹³ But when he comes,

The Holy Spirit promised in John 14:25-26. Even now, at the very end of His public life, there is much that Jesus cannot say and that must await the enlightening activity of the Holy Spirit.

the Spirit of truth,

The "truth" to which the Holy Spirit guides the community must have the same sense as "truth" elsewhere in the Gospel: Belief in Jesus as the sole revelation of God and the one who speaks the words of God (John 3:20,33; 8:40,47). The Paraclete helps the community fulfill the injunction of 8:31-32: "If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."

he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears,

As Christ has spoken of Himself in relation to the Father (see [John 12:49](#); 14:10) so He speaks of the Spirit in relation to Himself.

and will declare to you the things that are coming.

Predictive prophecy is part of the Spirit's function (see Acts 21:11). The Paraclete guides the community into its understanding of Jesus as the fulfillment of everything that had been promised in Scripture.

¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.

The function of the Paraclete is to glorify Jesus and to take what the Father has given Jesus and declare it to the disciples. The glorification which the Son has from the Father and

which is in turn the glorification of the Father (John 12:23,28; 13:31), is continued in the Church (see John 14:13) through the activity of the Spirit which continues the work of Christ.

¹⁵ Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.

As the existence of the Church is the result of the shared life of the Father and the Son (see John 3:35; 5:20; 10:30) so its continuance is the result of the shared life of Son and Spirit.

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