

CHAPTER 2

The Trinity

The very first truth we hold by faith is that God exists. Now this truth can also be known without faith; man can reach it by his reason. What matters is not how we come to know or believe it but what it means to us, how we respond to it. You see, so many people treat this truth with indifference. But once you seriously admit that God exists it turns everything around. What matters is no longer just *me* but *God*. His will matters, not just mine; his plans, not just mine.

Many times people ask, “Wasn’t it boring for God before he made Heaven and earth? He was all by himself, with nothing to do or see and no place to go.”

If you have ever had this thought, it is because you are thinking that God is just like you. Yes, if *you* had to be by yourself from all eternity, you would be bored to death. That is because you are not perfect. As a perfect being, God needs only himself to be happy.

What does it mean to be a perfect being? Since all we really know are our own imperfect selves, it is hard to understand what “perfection” is. But if we think about our imperfections and then remember that God does not have them, we will begin to understand.

No matter how hard we try, we all commit sins some time or another. But God is *all-holy*; he cannot do or think any evil.

There are many things we cannot do because we are not strong or smart enough. Even in

those skills where we do best, we will never be perfect. God is *almighty*. He can do everything perfectly and without effort.

However hard we study, most knowledge will never be ours in this life. God is *all-knowing*. He knows all the mysteries of the universe and everything about himself. And unlike people, who can only think of one thing at a time, God can “see” all his knowledge at once.

We are always changing. We are for ever stopping one action and starting another. For example, we must often stop what we are doing and eat or go to sleep. We must move around after a long period of sitting or standing if we want to avoid getting cramps. Even growing, a change that is good for us, means leaving behind some of the joys of childhood in exchange for certain advantages of being grown up. How much better it would be to have the best things of childhood and adulthood, all at once!

Unlike us, God is *eternal* and *unchanging*. He never had a beginning or point where he “started up”, nor will he ever come to an end. Nothing he does starts or stops either. He does not go from one joy to another, but enjoys all happiness eternally.

We cannot see God, because he is pure spirit; he has no body. Therefore he is not confined to one place at a time. God is *omnipresent*, meaning that he is everywhere.

Three in One

There is something else that may help us see that God couldn't have been "lonely" before he created the world. You have heard of it before. It is the Blessed Trinity.

Although there is only one God, there are three Persons in God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. From all eternity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit knew and loved one another. Each of the three Persons has all the perfections of God we have discussed.

The Blessed Trinity is a mystery we will never completely understand, even in Heaven. When we think of the Trinity now, we usually make the mistake of picturing three gods, not one, or of picturing one God with three "parts". Neither is correct. There is only one God, yet each of the three divine Persons is completely God, not one-third of God. The Church's teachers describe this by saying that although there are three *Persons* in God, he has only one *nature*.

By *nature* we mean *what* a thing is. Person means *who* someone is. Suppose you ran into a friendly alien from another planet who had just landed on earth. If he asked: "What are you?" your answer would be "a human being". If he then asked "Who are you?" you would reply, "Sarah", "John", or whatever your name is. With the Blessed Trinity, the answer to "What

are you?" would be "God". The answer to "Who are you?" would be "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit."

This Is a Mystery

You may wonder why we bother studying something that we cannot really understand. The reason is that God wants us to know as much about him as we can. Otherwise, he would not have told us about himself. Also, if we love someone, we want to know things about that person. We love to hear our parents tell us about their childhood. We are happy to learn even a little about our Heavenly Father. We look forward to learning much more when we finally come to live with him in Heaven.

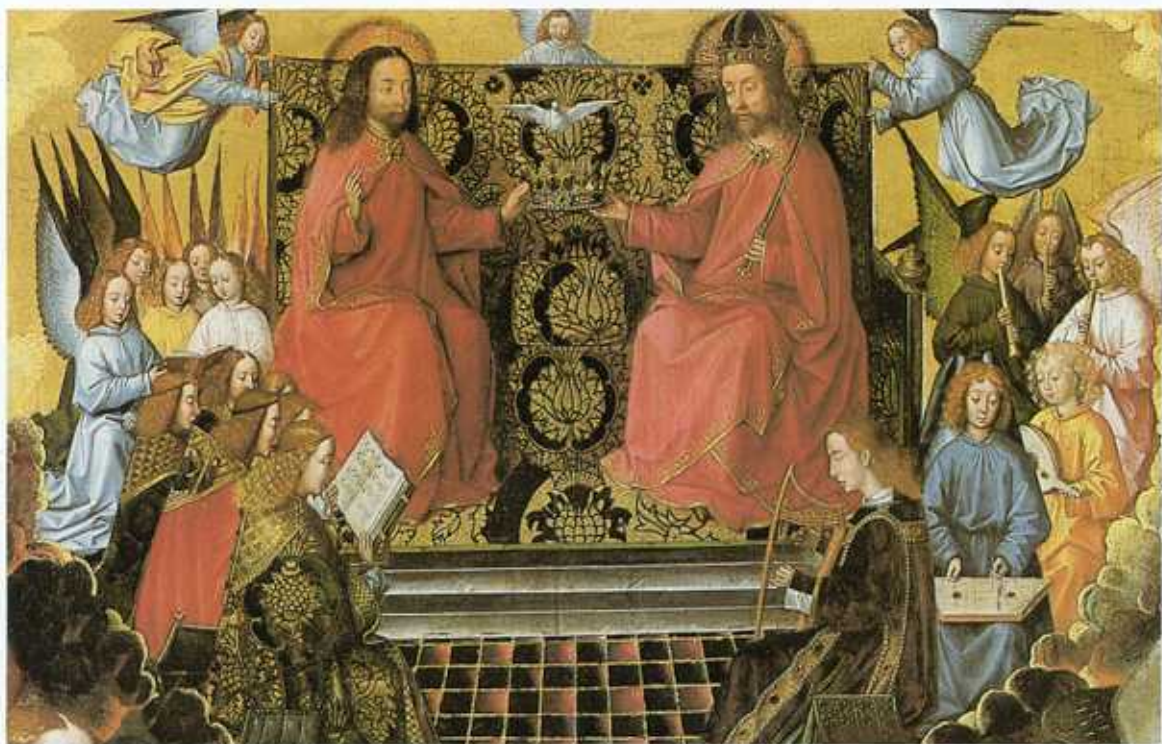
Words to Know:

Trinity nature Person

I arise today
Through a mighty strength,
The invocation of the Trinity.
Through belief in the threeness,
Through confession of the oneness,
Of the Creator of creation

— St. Patrick

"I believe in God, the Father almighty. . . , in Jesus Christ, his only Son Our Lord. . . , and in the Holy Spirit. . . ."



Q. 8 *What does “Unity of God” mean?*

By “Unity of God” we mean that there is only one God.

Q. 9 *What does “Trinity of God” mean?*

By “Trinity of God” we mean that there are three equal persons in God, really distinct from each other: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Q. 10 *What does “three Persons really distinct” mean?*

By “three Persons really distinct” we mean that in God one Person is not the other Person, although at the same time all three are one God.

Q. 11 *Do we understand how the three Divine Persons, although really distinct, are only one God?*

We do not understand nor can we understand how the three Divine Persons, although really distinct, are only one God. This is a mystery.

Q. 12 *Who is the first Person of the Most Holy Trinity?*

The first Person of the Most Holy Trinity is the *Father*.

Q. 13 *Who is the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity?*

The second Person of the Most Holy Trinity is the *Son*.

Q. 14 *Who is the third Person of the Most Holy Trinity?*

The third Person of the Most Holy Trinity is the *Holy Spirit*.

Q. 15 *Why is the Father the first Person of the Most Holy Trinity?*

The Father is the first Person of the Most Holy Trinity because he does not proceed from another Person and because the other two Persons, the Son and the Holy Spirit, proceed from him.

Q. 16 *Why is the Son the second Person of the Holy Trinity?*

The Son is the second Person of the Holy Trinity because he is generated by the Father and because he together with the Father is the principle of the Holy Spirit.

Q. 17 *Why is the Holy Spirit the third Person of the Most Holy Trinity?*

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Most Holy Trinity because he proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Q. 18 *Is each Person of the Most Holy Trinity God?*

Yes, each Person of the Most Holy Trinity is God.

Q. 19 *If each Divine Person is God, are the three Divine Persons therefore three gods?*

The three Divine Persons are not three gods, but only one God, because they have the one and same *unique* divine nature or substance.

Q. 20 *Are the three Divine Persons equal, or is one greater, more powerful, and more wise than the others?*

The three Divine persons, since they are only one God, are equal in every respect, and they possess equally and in common every perfection and every action. However, certain perfections and certain things that they do are attributed more to one Person than to another, as, for example, divine power and the activity of creation are attributed to the Father.

Q. 21 *But at least the Father existed before the Son and the Holy Spirit, did he not?*

The Father did not exist before the Son and the Holy Spirit, because the three Divine Persons, having in common the unique divine nature which is eternal, are all equally eternal.