

THE TRINITY: THE GOD OF JESUS

Proverbs 8. 1-4, 22-31

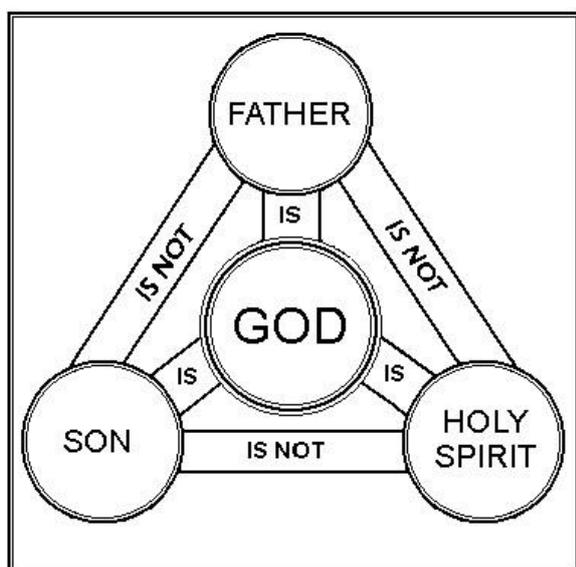
Romans 5. 1-5

John 16. 12-15

I speak to you in the name of ☩ the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

I have just invoked the Name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, the Name into which each one of us has been baptised, the Three Persons whose Names come to us from the lips of our Lord himself.

The Church has a symbolic diagram of the Trinity, which perhaps you have seen. In case you haven't, it is given here:



In the diagram, you can see that there is a circle that has three equal circles, in a triangle, around it. The centre circle is God. The three surrounding circles are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each Person in the exterior triangle is connected with the other, but the connection is labelled 'is not'. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father. And then, we see

that each Person has been connected with the centre circle. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. It is a mystery, this dynamic paradox of the catholic faith that was introduced by the teaching of Jesus.

Some theologians have used the analogy of water to describe the Holy Trinity, saying that it is one substance in three forms: liquid, steam and ice. St Patrick used the three-leafed clover, the shamrock, when he first evangelised the Irish. St Augustine used the analogy of the human soul: Memory, Reason and Will for the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

Whatever diagram or analogy we may use, the important thing to know is that the Holy and Undivided Trinity is not an invention of theologians; nor is it a construct of the Church. The Trinity is the mystery of the God in whom we live, given to the Church by Christ. Our Lord himself manifested the full doctrine of the Holy Trinity in his words and works, all of which ultimately served to bring him to his trial, condemnation, and crucifixion.

Today, and very briefly, I would like us to consider one point, and then three points; in other words, first the Oneness and then the Threeness of our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

Firstly, the Oneness. In the gospel of St Mark, when asked by one of the scribes, ‘which commandment is the first of all?’, Jesus said, “The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is *one*; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength””.¹ Here, Christ quotes Moses, who gave the same teaching to God’s people in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy.²

And now the Threeness: the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is truth that is also revealed by the teaching of our Lord.

¹ Cf. Mk 12. 29.

² Cf Dt 6. 4.

Firstly, concerning the Father. The distinguishing mark of the teaching of Jesus about God is that he called God: ‘Abba’, or ‘Father’, directly and personally. You can count on your fingers the number of times in the Old Testament that God is referred to or likened to as a Father. But in the New Testament, especially in the gospels on the lips of Christ, there are 132 direct references to the Father. This is the unique contribution of our Lord to the teaching about God. In fact, it is more than a teaching; it is a direct, personal relationship offered to us by Jesus, through adoption and grace, to enjoy with and in him, so that we may say, ‘Our Father’.³

Secondly, concerning the Son. As we will remember, Christ spoke and acted as the divine Son of God as well as the Son of Man (a term which he often used to refer to himself).⁴ As the Son of God, he forgave sins. He worked signs and miracles; including signs which revealed him to be the Master of Nature herself. He drove out evil spirits, who frequently identified and howled against his divine nature. He healed sickness and infirmity; including crossing taboos⁵ and entering deeply into the heart of sin, uncleanness, and social quarantine to bestow forgiveness and new life. When his religious and moral enemies, driven to a frenzy of opposition, said, ‘If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly’, he responded, ‘The Father and I *are one*’.⁶ And when he was on trial for his life, when the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’, he responded, ‘*I am*,⁷ and “you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power” and “coming with the clouds of heaven”’.⁸

Thirdly, concerning the Holy Spirit. Our Lord, when he was departing from this world, told his disciples he would pray his Father to send to them ‘another Advocate,

³ Cf. Rom 8. 15 ; Gal 4. 4-7.

⁴The term ‘Son of Man’ has generally been considered to be a reference to the humanity of the incarnate Jesus. It is also, however, a messianic title which is first given to our Lord in Daniel 7. 13-14. Christ will be enthroned as the ruler over the whole earth, and his kingdom will never be destroyed, whether on earth or in heaven. See also Rev 1. 13.; Mk 14. 62; Rev 1. 7.

⁵He said that the Law was made for man (and not man for the Law); and he also said that the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

⁶ Cf. Jn 10. 30.

⁷ A subtle reference to the name of God. Cf. Jn 8. 57-59; Ex 3. 13-15.

⁸ Cf. Mk 14. 61-62.

to be with you for ever. 'This is the Spirit of truth'.⁹ On Easter Day, risen from the dead, he breathed on them, and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'.¹⁰ And having ascended to the Father, Jesus prepared the Church to receive that same Spirit, the 'power from on high',¹¹ on the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit empowered and endowed the Church as the living Body of Christ to the ends of the earth and the end of the ages. This same Spirit, our Lord said, will 'glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.'¹²

This is the Holy and Undivided Trinity, the living and true God, proclaimed and explained by Jesus. What then about Church Doctrine concerning the Trinity? I could go into detail about the various doctrines that have been adopted by the Church concerning the Holy Trinity; but perhaps today the best recommendation that I can give to you is to read the words of the Creeds,¹³ which we say at Mass every Sunday. The Creeds of the Church are, in a sense, the 'grammar' of our faith; and they stem from the teachings of Christ about the Trinity. The teachings of our Lord are the foundation of our faith, which is a faith of the mind and of the intellect as well as a faith of the heart and the emotions, a faith that is defined by love.

And that brings us to a good place to end; for the Holy Trinity shows that God is love. God is a Trinity and Communion of Love, pouring out infinitely to creation, filling the world with his glory, redeeming and sanctifying it. Jesus showed us that the first and great commandment, to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul, leads necessarily to our love of neighbour. Even more than that, Christ said, 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You

⁹ Cf. Jn 14. 16-17.

¹⁰ Cf. Jn 20. 22.

¹¹ Cf. Lk 24. 49.

¹² Cf. Jn 16. 14.

¹³ Cf. the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed and the Apostles' Creed.

are my friends if you do what I command you...I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.¹⁴

When we love like this, we have a part in the Trinity.

Amen.

¹⁴ Cf. Jn 15. 12-14, 17.