

Topic: The Holy Trinity & Nicene Creed

IHM

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

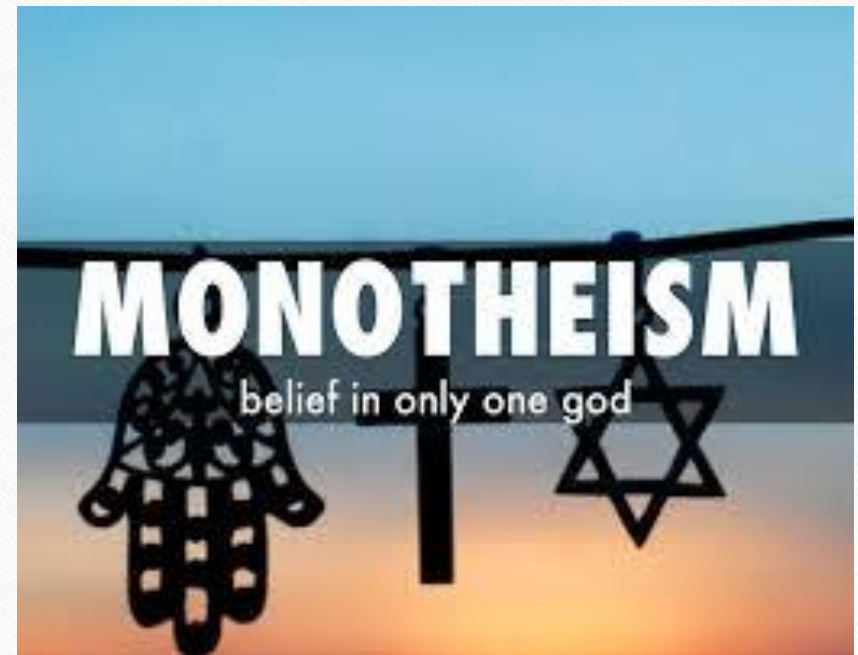
Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and
the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

“Bless us, O Lord, and these thy
gifts, which we are about to
receive. From thy bounty, through
Christ our Lord, Amen.”

God is One: Christians Are Monotheistic

- Monotheism: the belief in one God
 - Rooted in the faith of Abraham, the father of all 3 monotheistic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, & Islam.
 - We come from Jewish origins of a fiercely monotheistic people, surrounded and often persecuted by polytheistic (many gods) neighbors.
 - Shema: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.”—Deuteronomy 6:4



God is Three-in-One: Christians Are Trinitarian



- Even before the doctrine was articulated, it was experienced in the Christian community.
 - We are Baptized into the life of the Trinity, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (The same Trinity we invoke in the sign of the cross.)
- The Trinity is the central mystery of our Christian faith.
 - A *mystery* in the sense that it is a revealed truth that is beyond our experience and ability to fully grasp.

Trinity: Doctrine Defined

- The Doctrine of the Trinity was articulated through the Ecumenical Church Councils (and early Church Fathers) of the 4th & 5th centuries (Councils of Nicaea in 325, Constantinople in 381, Ephesus in 431, and Chalcedon in 451), but revealed earlier through the Scriptures (especially in the New Testament).
 - Cf. Lk 10:21-22; Jn 14:9, 17:11; Mt 28:19
- Ecumenical Council: a worldwide gathering of Catholic Bishops convened by the Pope to discuss and resolve issues and problems the universal Church is facing.
- Church Fathers: teachers and writers in the early Church, many of whom were bishops, whose teachings are a witness to the Apostolic Tradition, and who significantly helped develop early Church teaching and doctrine (ie. St. Augustine, St. Irenaeus, etc.)



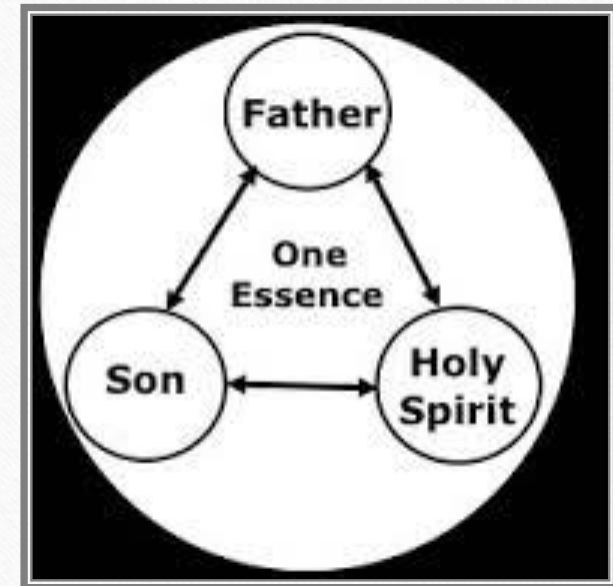
Trinity: Doctrine Articulated



- The Trinity is the Christian belief in One God, revealed and experienced as three distinct “persons”—Father, Son, & Spirit.
- The Triune God is of one “substance/essence/being” (ousia in Greek), “the divine being in its unity.” (That’s why we say Jesus is “consubstantial” with the Father.)
- The One Triune God consists of three Divine “Persons” (hypostasis in Greek), meaning that the Father, Son, and Spirit are all distinct.
- The word “relation” is used to indicate that the distinction among the three Persons lies in the relationship of each to the others.

The 3 Divine Persons are inseparable...

- ...in what they are: each is fully God—complete, whole, and entire.
- ...in what they do: each is equally engaged in the work of our salvation (creating us, redeeming us, and making us holy, etc.)



Even though the three Divine Persons are inseparably one, they are also truly distinct from one another:



- In origin (though all are eternal): the Father is the “Generator,” the Son is “begotten” of the Father, and the (Holy) Spirit “proceeds” from the Father and the Son.
- In how they carry out the work of our salvation (though all carry it out equally): the Father draws us to follow the Son (Christ); the Son became Incarnate; the Spirit is sent into each believer’s heart and to guide the Church (with the “Gifts of the Holy Spirit”)



A good concrete illustration of the Blessed Trinity is an equilateral triangle. Such a triangle has three sides equal in every way, and yet distinct from each other. There are three sides, but only one triangle. As we see in this illustration, each Divine

Person is different from the other two, but all three are God. Each one is God, distinct from the two others, and yet one with them. The three Persons are equal in every way, with one nature and one substance: three Divine Persons, but only one God.

Trinitarian Heresies: The Two Extremes

Sabellianism/Modalism:

- From Sabellius, a priest in the 3rd century who stated that there really is no distinction of three Divine Persons within the Godhead; merely One God experienced/perceived by believers in three modes or aspects.
- Affirms the oneness of God, but denies the distinction of Persons.

Tritheism:

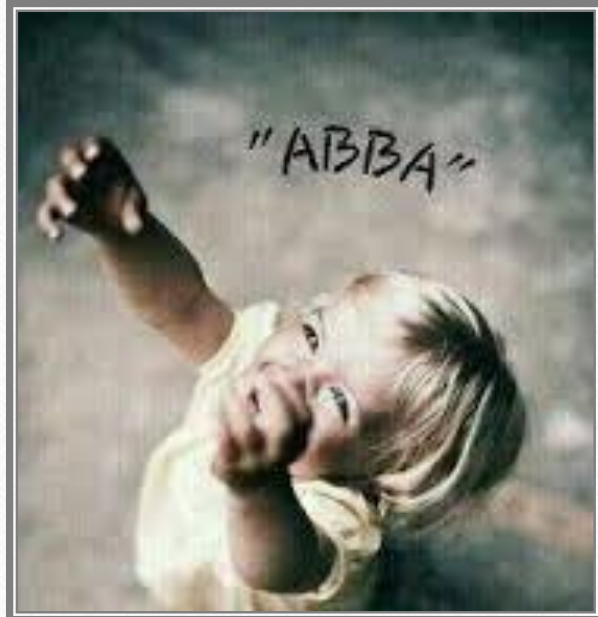
- States that there are three co-equal deities.
- Affirms the distinction of persons, but denies the oneness of God.

The Trinity: Model for Human Relationships

- The Trinity, as a dynamic communion of Persons who dwell together in love and unity, acts as a model of how we are to love one another and work to build unity and communion among all peoples.
- The Trinity is an active God, a God of communion and not of isolation, calling us to do the same.
- We are created from, and for, community & love.
- The Heart & Life and truest definition of the Trinity is Love.
- I John 4:7-21



A Communion of Persons: God the Father



- God the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, has been experienced and revealed not only as All-Powerful Creator, but as Loving Parent
 - most often “Father,” owing to the patriarchal societies of the early scriptures and Church, but equally valid to call “Mother,” (there are feminine images for God also in the OT & NT) as God is neither male nor female, but as Jesus said, “spirit”—transcending gender.
 - Jesus called God “Abba,” or Father/Daddy indicating the filial relationship that he had with his Father, and by extension, we have with God as well.
 - Calling God “Father” is about intimacy, not gender.

A Communion of Persons: God the Son

- God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, has been experienced and revealed through the person of Jesus the Christ, as God Incarnate (in the flesh)
- The name Jesus/Joshua/Yeshua means “God saves,” and reminds us that through the Incarnation, God the Son has revealed the passionate love of God that seeks all of us out for love, reconciliation, redemption and communion.





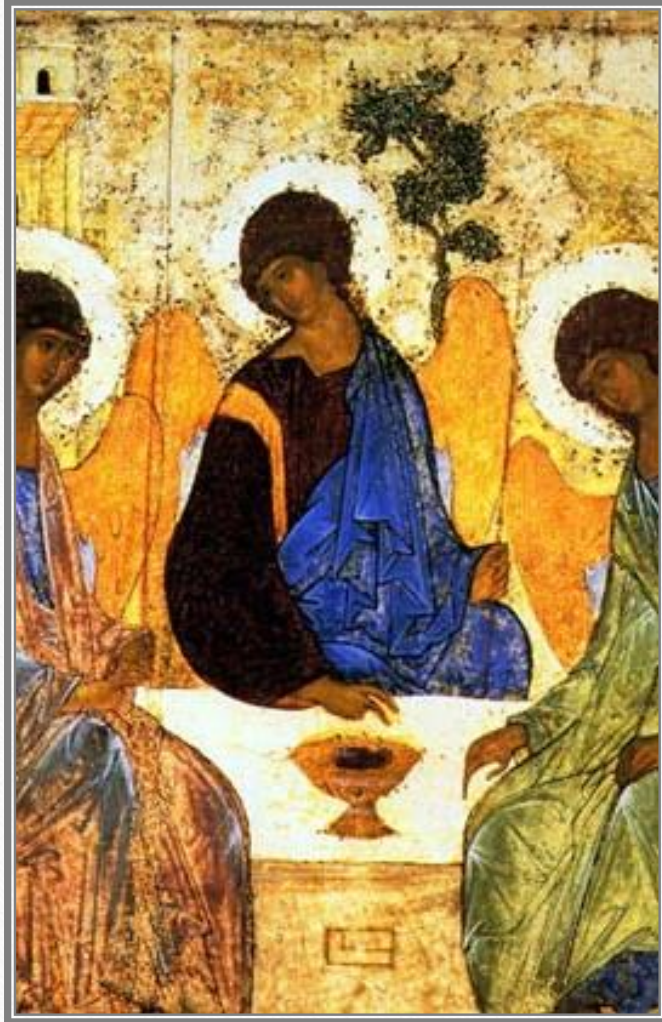
A Communion of Persons: God the Holy Spirit

- God the (Holy) Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, has been experienced and revealed as the Paraclete, sent at Pentecost to be our advocate, guide, teacher and helper
- The Spirit reveals a God that remains always with us, and sends us on a mission to make God's love and presence a reality in our world and lives.
- We speak of "7 Gifts" of the Holy Spirit to aid us in this mission: wisdom, understanding, counsel/right judgment, fortitude/courage, knowledge, piety/reverence, and "Fear of the Lord"/wonder and awe.

Ultimately, the Trinity is a Mystery, Language is Imperfect, and We Struggle to Understand Through Analogy

- “Why, therefore, do we not call these three together one person, as one essence and one God, but say three persons, while we do not say three Gods or three essences; unless it be because we wish some one word to serve for that meaning whereby the Trinity is understood, that we might not be altogether silent, when asked, what three, while we confessed that they are three?”—St. Augustine, “On the Trinity” Book 7, ch. 6:11





Images & Analogies of the Trinity

Andrei Rublev's Icon of the Holy Trinity

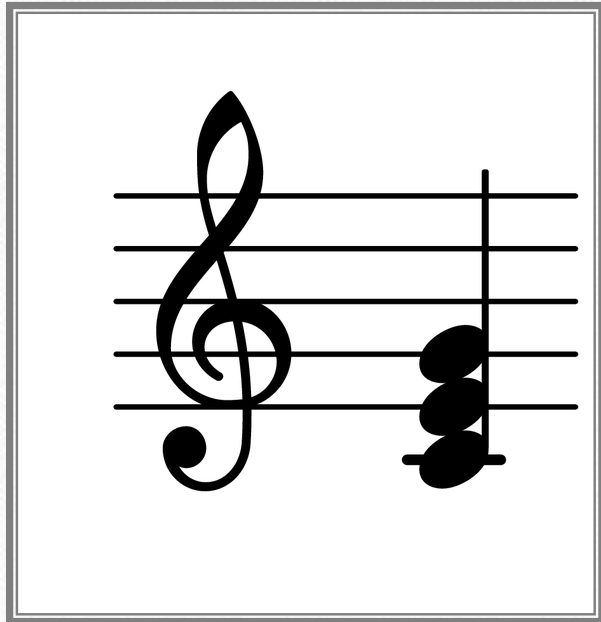
http://www.holy-transfiguration.org/library_en/lord_trinity_rublev.html

Trinitarian Analogies: St. Augustine

- Human Love: Lover, Beloved, Love shared among them & from them



Trinitarian Analogies: St. Ignatius of Loyola



- St. Ignatius of Loyola's vision/understanding/enlightenment/experience of the Trinity as 3 keys playing in a chord

Trinitarian Analogies: St. Patrick

- St. Patrick's analogy of the Trinity as a 3 leafed clover/shamrock



Trinitarian Analogies: Tertullian of Carthage

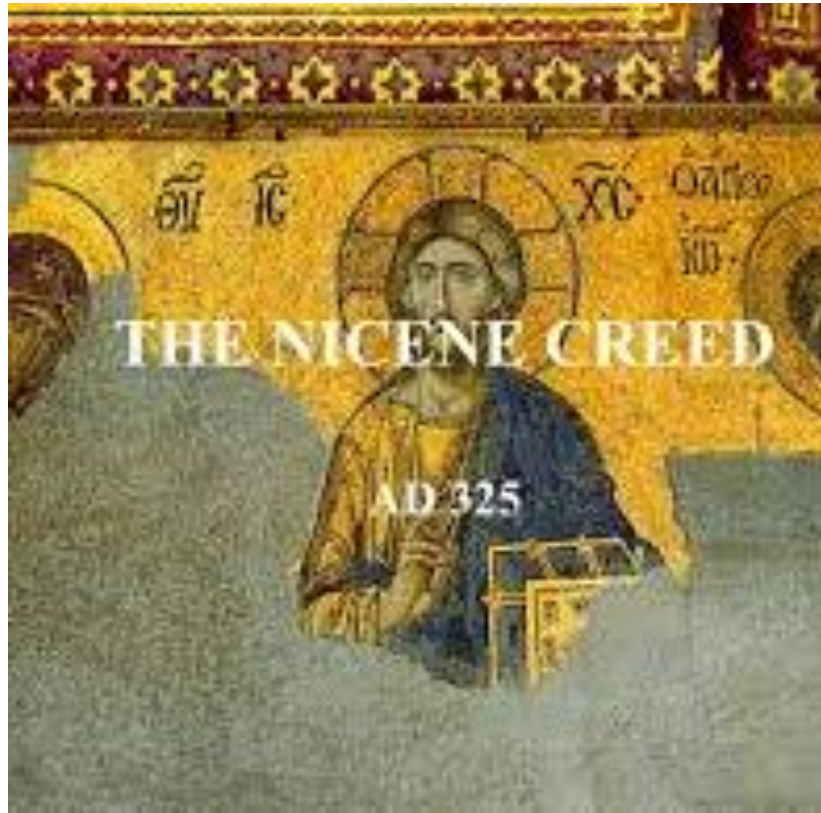


- Root, shoot, fruit
- Spring, river, canal
- Sun, ray, focus of a ray
- “The Son was produced from the Father, but was not separated from him. For God produces the Word... as a root produces the shoot, a spring the river, the sun a ray, for these manifestations are projections of the those substances from which they proceed. I would not hesitate to call a shoot “the son of a root”, a river “the son of a spring”, a ray “the son of the sun”.... But the shoot is not detached from the root, the river is not detached from the spring, the ray is not detached from the sun; nor is the Word detached from God.” (*against Praxeus* 7)

Trinitarian Analogies & Images

- No analogy is perfect, exhaustive, or complete.
- Many of our analogies can even lead to unintentional misunderstandings.
- From the Athanasian Creed: “And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.”





Our Core Beliefs: The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

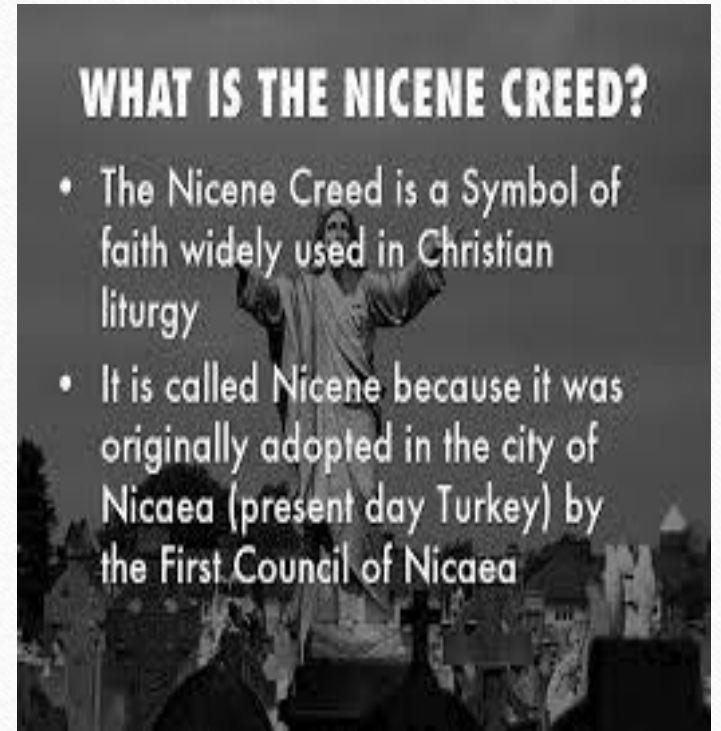
- Great summary of the core Christian doctrines of faith.
 - Used at Sunday Eucharistic celebrations and at liturgical “solemnities:” important holy days in the Catholic liturgical calendar.
 - Tied to Baptism, as the sacrament of initiation that enters one into the Christian faith. (On the premise that you should know what you claim to be, and have become.)

Our Core Beliefs: The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

- The “Nicene Creed” expresses 4 key doctrines:
 - Trinitarian faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit
 - Identifies Jesus’ birth, death, Resurrection, and Ascension as key events in our salvation
 - States the 4 “marks”/characteristics of the Church as being one, holy, catholic, and apostolic
 - Affirms belief in the resurrection of the dead and in the Last Judgment and communion of saints

WHAT IS THE NICENE CREED?

- The Nicene Creed is a Symbol of faith widely used in Christian liturgy
- It is called Nicene because it was originally adopted in the city of Nicaea (present day Turkey) by the First Council of Nicaea



I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
consubstantial with the Father;

Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was **incarnate**
of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

The Nicene Creed:

For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the
Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic,
and apostolic Church.
I confess one baptism for the
forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection
of the dead and the life of the world to
come. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Please share:

- What struck you from today's Mass readings?
- Does the faith presented in the Nicene Creed stir your heart and bring you joy?
- What about the Creed do you still have questions about?
- Do you feel drawn at this time to further explore this faith in our Trinitarian God (even if you still have plenty of questions, doubts, or concerns)?
- Do you feel called and ready to enter the next period of discernment and enter the Catechumenate?
- What questions did this topic and readings raise in your heart or mind?

Closing Prayer: Glory Be

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning,
Is now, and ever shall be,
World without end,
Amen.