

Trinity Sunday

Year C, 2025

Prv 8:22-31

Rom 5:1-5

Ps 8

Jn 16:12-15

Trinitarian temptations

Trinity Sunday is a day of temptation for priests. When it comes to our preaching, we are tempted to address, explain, and expound theologically on the foundational Christian belief in the Trinity in the space of a ten- to fifteen-minute homily. If we give in to that temptation, we are likely to do a disservice to the Trinity, to the homily, and to the congregation. First, because the doctrine of the Trinity does not lend itself to adequate explanation in such a short period of time. Second, because the Sunday homily is not really the right time and place for such dense theological and philosophical expositions. And third, because given these constraints, we preachers will likely leave our hearers more confused than enlightened and probably with erroneous (or even heretical) notions about the Trinity.

But there is another temptation. Instead of trying to say too much about the Trinity in technical, theological terms, we say too little or we do so in too light-hearted a manner. This temptation, too, must be overcome, because we cannot love what we do not know. And so it is important that we know something about the Trinity.

For millennia, God was slowly revealing himself through his creation. Then the Father began to reveal himself through Israel, his chosen people, and through the prophets of Israel, hinting at

the Son and the Holy Spirit. Then in the fullness of time came the Son, who revealed both the Father and himself and spoke directly about the coming Spirit. Then came the Holy Spirit, who reveals the Father, the Son, and himself. And this great revelation is love, for God is love (1 Jn 4:8).

The love that each of the Persons of the blessed Trinity have for each other is the love that the Trinity extends toward us. The more and the better, then, that we understand the Trinity, the more and the better that we can love God in return. “We love,” St John teaches in his first letter (4:19), “because [God] loved us first.”

And what is the quality of God’s love for us? Jesus explains this John’s Gospel (15:9): “As the Father loves me, so I also love you.” The love that the Father has for the Son, this is how the Son loves us. Jesus shows us the Father’s love, extends to us the Father’s love, transforms us in the Father’s love. And then he tells us to remain in *his* love (Jn 15:9), that is, in his love for the Father (Jn 14:31), just as he remains in his Father’s love (Jn 15:10). Which brings us to the Holy Spirit, who is the love of Father and Son, which the Son will ask to Father to send in his name (Jn 14:10, 26) as our advocate, defender, comforter.

Knowledge and love, then are intertwined, just as faith and understanding are bound together. The more we know, the more we can love. The more we understand, the more our faith grows. And love drives us to greater knowledge and produces greater knowledge, just as faith seeks understanding and makes it grow.

Which is why, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church, throughout her centuries, and especially in her early centuries, devised various creeds to express a true and authentic understanding of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – so that with true understanding of God, the people of God could grow in love for their God.

This year, as I have already mentioned, we commemorate the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, formulated in the year 325, which we recite at Mass every Sunday. The Nicene Creed was born precisely out of early uncertainty as to an adequate and authentic understanding of the blessed Trinity, especially concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son, and then later, on the nature and person of the Holy Spirit.

And this brings us to a third temptation on Trinity Sunday, but this one is shared both by the priest and the congregation. When reciting the Nicene Creed, we sometimes do so without either understanding or love, and so we defeat the purpose of the Creed altogether. In many churches, the Creed is recited far too fast – a bunch of words to be gotten through. Or else, on an individual level, we recite the words by rote, without thought, meaning, or understanding. Rather, our disposition when reciting the Creed should be this: we should *pray* the Creed – not just recite it – and we should pray it by *heart* – not by rote. The Creed is something we should know by heart, which surely means more than just having it memorized.

In the eucharistic liturgy, the Creed becomes a prayer, a profession of our understanding of the Trinitarian God whom we worship and adore, whom we love because he loved us first, as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit. So as not to succumb to the temptation to rush through the Creed or to recite it inattentively, we need to slow down and savor the words we speak, to speak them in faith, to *pray* them, to feel ourselves joining together in professing our common faith, a faith we share not only with each other gathered here today, but the faith we share with Catholics across the continents, throughout the centuries, the faith we share even with other non-Catholic Christians who profess the same Creed, as virtually all Christian denominations do.

So, let's look briefly at the Nicene Creed, and as we grow in our understanding of it, we may grow also in our love for the God whom we profess by it.

The Nicene Creed can be said to be one creed, with two sections, and four parts. I'll explain. One creed, that's simple. You get it. There are two sections: the Trinitarian section and the ecclesial section. There is one section on the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and one section on the Church, as she is now and as she will be in the life of the world to come. This second section on the Church is also the fourth part. If you look in the paperback missalette on page 12 or in the blue hymnal at number 174, you will see the four parts, each one beginning with the words "I believe."

Now the first section, the Trinitarian section, can be divided into three parts, one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Spirit. In the part on the Father, we profess that there is one God, who is almighty, the creator who made all things. In the part on the Son, we profess that he, too is God as the Father is God – consubstantial, one in being – with the Father, through whom all things are made. The part on the Son is the longest, as it then details the Son’s incarnation, his passion and death, his resurrection and ascension, and his coming again in glory to establish an everlasting kingdom. In the part on the Holy Spirit, we profess that he is Lord, God as the Father and the Son are God, adored and glorified with them. The Spirit is the giver of life, and it is he who has spoken through the prophets.

So we have one creed, in two sections, with four parts to profess the one God in three divine Persons. Just appreciating how the creed is structured can give us insight and understanding and lead us to a more reflective, prayerful recitation of this ancient profession of faith during Mass.

Now the Nicene Creed isn’t the only creed used by the Catholic Church. You’re familiar, of course, with the Apostles’ Creed, which was the ancient baptismal creed of the Church of Rome and which we use when we begin the rosary. Less familiar is the so-called Athanasian Creed, an excerpt of which I have included for you in today’s bulletin. The Athanasian Creed was formulated about 200 or so years after the Nicene Creed. It is much longer and contains

an extensive creedal statement on the blessed Trinity. I invite you to take home with you a copy of the bulletin so that you can read and pray the Athanasian Creed, not just once, but many times through, patiently and prayerfully, and so grow in understanding and love of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the spirit of the creeds, I will close my homily today by reading to you the excerpt you will find in the bulletin. Listen well to this exposition of our belief in the holy Trinity. Hear and believe. Believe and be saved. The Athanasian Creed begins with these word:

Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all, keep the Catholic faith. This is what the Catholic faith teaches: we worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance.

For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Spirit. But the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have one divinity, equal glory, and coeternal majesty.

What the Father is, the Son is, and the Holy Spirit is. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, and the Holy Spirit is uncreated. The Father is boundless, the Son is boundless, and the Holy Spirit is boundless. The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, and the Holy Spirit is eternal.

Nevertheless, there are not three eternal beings, but one eternal being. So there are not three uncreated beings, nor three boundless beings, but one

uncreated being, one boundless being. Likewise, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty. Yet there are not three almighty beings, but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. However, there are not three gods, but one God. The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Spirit is Lord. However, there are not three lords, but one Lord.

For as we are obliged by Christian truth to acknowledge every Person singly to be God and Lord, so too are we forbidden by the Catholic religion to say that there are three gods or lords.

The Father was not made, nor created, nor generated by anyone. The Son is not made, nor created, but begotten by the Father alone. The Holy Spirit is not made, nor created, nor generated, but proceeds from the Father and the Son.

There is, then, one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.

In this Trinity, there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less. The entire three Persons are coeternal and coequal with one another. So that in all things, as has been said, the Unity is to be worshiped in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity. Whoever, therefore, who wishes to be saved, must believe thus about the Trinity.

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