

GOD'S INNERMOST SECRET

GOD AS ONE AND THREE (Nos. 185–278)

SESSION OBJECTIVES

After this session, you should be able to identify ...

- That God has one nature, expressed in three distinct Persons.
- That God's plan of salvation has a Trinitarian form.
- That the Creed is the salvation "story in miniature" revealing the three- fold plan of God: God the Father (Creation and Promise), God the Son (Redemption), and God the Holy Spirit (Sanctification).

PART 1: GETTING YOUR BEARINGS

We sometimes think of the Bible as a book of information about God. In this session, however, we will find that God's revelation and our response of faith are not primarily a simple exchange of information. As we have already emphasized, revelation and faith are the beginning of the work of transformation that God wills for us, the beginning of the journey of faith. This transformation in faith involves much more than just learning new information about God.

The *Catechism* makes it clear that, although God is supremely powerful and could have simply forced us to be what he wants, he chose instead to introduce himself to us personally, inviting a free response of love. Lovers always seek to make themselves known to those they love. In Christ, God shares his innermost secret-that he is a loving communion of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The name of God: "Hello, my name is ..."

What does the name of your beloved mean to you? Or the name of your child or best friend? It means everything.

Learning a name is the first step toward loving someone.

Throughout the Old Testament, God slowly revealed himself in a prolonged courtship with his chosen people. Yet even the patriarchs-Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob-did not know the name of the one true God.

Then, one eventful day, in front of a miraculous "burning" bush, Moses encountered the presence of God and was privileged to learn the divine name.

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you' ... this is my name for ever; and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations" (Exodus 3: 13-15).

From that day, God continued to reveal himself until the world met the human face of God in Jesus: "*I have come in my Father's name ...*" (John 5:43; see John 10:25). Jesus, too, bears the divine name: "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM" (John 8:28, NAB).

This "central mystery of Christian faith and life" (No. 234), the Most Holy Trinity, is also the source and destination of all things. Although it is a mystery in the fullest sense-something we could not have known if God had not revealed it-God's Trinitarian life has still left a clear stamp on everything that he has done. Even in his Old Testament works of creation and covenant-making with Israel, he has left us hints as to who he is. God doesn't just reveal information; he reveals *himself*.

The *Catechism* tells us that the working out of God's plan (the "economy of salvation:" or "divine economy") is identical to "... the ways and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men ..." (No. 234). The Creed itself is fundamentally Trinitarian in form. It is also a kind of mini-history of the way God has created, redeemed, and sanctified us. We might even say that the Creed is really the Bible "in brief" This means that the whole story of the working out of God's plan in history-in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the history of the Church-is itself Trinitarian, like the Creed.

We find that the more we know about God, who is the blessing from which we come and toward which we journey, the surer our steps toward him will be in our journey of faith. He is not only our destination but also our constant companion on the way; he does not watch from a distance; he is there at every step.

Recall that we have referred to the Creed as the "story in miniature:" This compressed story can supply only a brief sketch of the characters. That is what we get in this session, because the primary characters- the primary actors in this drama-are the Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is their work that the Creed celebrates in its three major parts, which will be the subject of the rest of this *Pillars Study*.



BEGIN WITH PRAYER

This week, read Exodus 3. Consider making a few of the verses in that passage the subject of a short prayer each day this week.

MYTH BUSTER

Myth: "The Eucharist is the central belief in Catholic life;"

The Eucharist is not listed formally in the articles of faith within the Creed, yet it is intrinsically connected to belief in Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity. The Eucharist is his Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. It is very important to the sacramental life of the Church and is often referred to as "the source and summit of Christian life" (*Lumen Gen ti um*, 11). But the central mystery of the Christian Faith is the Most Holy Trinity.

Examine the Creed carefully, and you will find that the three sections of the Creed correspond to the Triune God. The Trinity is our origin, and union with the Trinity is our ultimate end.

The Eucharist is a gift given to us for our redemption-that what was lost to sin may be regained through Christ's offering on the Cross-so we may one day live in eternity, beholding the Lord "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Until that day, the grace from the Eucharist is our supernatural sustenance and nurture.

So, while the Eucharist is absolutely central to Christian Faith and life, the Trinity is the "central mystery of Christian faith and life" (No. 234).

PART 2: QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR READING

READING THE CATECHISM

The presentation for Session Four will cover *Catechism* Nos. 185-278. If your time is limited, you might want to begin with the essential paragraphs for this session: 185, 186, 188, 190, 198,200,202,206,211,215, 218,221,232-234,236,240,245,249,251,254-256,258,260.

GLOSSARY TERMS

Here are some of the terms that are explained in Session Four:

Chi Rho (✠)

The first two letters of the Greek name *Christos*, which have been used in symbolic form from very early in Christian history as a monogram for Jesus Christ, usually in a form like this: In this course, the *chi rho* symbol will be used often to indicate the shape of salvation history as it has been revealed in its fullness in Jesus Christ.

Oikonomia

A Greek word that can be translated "economy;" meaning the way in which God has arranged the events of history to effect his plan of salvation in Christ and the Church.

Theologia

A Greek word that refers to the inner life of God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The English word *theology* is drawn from this term and refers to the study of those things revealed by God, the first of which is that he is one God in three Persons.

Trinitarian Relations

The three divine Persons, entirely one in nature, are distinct from one another only in how they relate to one another. The four relations are "paternity;" the fatherhood of the Father toward the Son; "filiation;" the sonship of the Son toward the Father; and the "active" and "passive spirations;" the loving regard of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father, which yields the procession of the Holy Spirit (active), which the Spirit receives and returns to the Father and the Son (passive).

Trinity

The mystery of one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The revealed truth

PART 3: PRESENTATION OUTLINE

SESSION FOUR: GOD'S INNERMOST SECRET: God as one and three (Nos. 185-278)

I. The Creed as Our Common Object of Faith (see No. 185)

- A. Personal faith is contained within the ecclesial (collective) faith of the Church
- B. The Creed is the salvation story in miniature (see No. 186)
- C. The Creed is a symbol (*symbolon* = "a gathering together")
 - 1. Creed originally used at baptisms as a summary of faith
 - 2. Trinitarian in form
- D. The Creed has three chapters or "parts" (see No. 190)
 - 1. Father-Creation
 - 2. Son-Redemption
 - 3. Holy Spirit-Sanctification
- E. The Apostles' Creed (shorter but also Trinitarian in form)
 - 1. Contains twelve Articles
 - 2. Tradition traces the use of the Apostles' Creed to first-century Rome
 - 3. Forms the structure of the *Catechism* content

II. The One God (No. 198)

- A. New Testament revelation of Trinity (three-in-one) rooted in the Old Testament
 - 1. "One God ..." given to Israel to prevent error of polytheism
 - 2. Law prevented the deification of sin
- B. God's Name Revealed at Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai-see No. 205)
 - 1. "I am ... the God of your fathers" -God of history and covenant
 - 2. "I Am who I Am" (YHWH)-God who is "there" (see No. 205)
 - 3. Revelation of God's name an invitation to a covenant relationship
- C. "Lord" title given to Christ indicates divine name (see No. 202)
 - 1. Profession of Christ's lordship marks transition of understanding from unity to Trinity
 - 2. Communicates God's mercy
- D. Truth and love are revealed in the Trinity as God's "innermost secret" (No. 221)

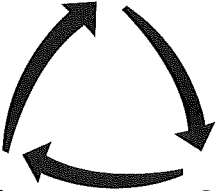
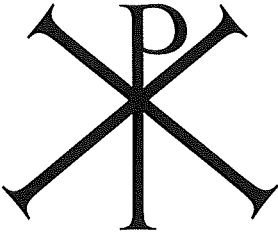
III. Three Persons in One God

- A. Son discloses Father, Father discloses Son, and the two disclose the Spirit.
- B. Theological Key: Trinity as "central mystery of Christian Faith and life" (No. 234)
- C. Salvation history (the "economy") is the story of God's revelation of his Trinitarian life (see No. 236):
 - 1. Father: Creator (God "fathers" by bringing forth children)

- 2 Son: Redeemer (the Son "re-creates" us in his image)
- 3 Holy Spirit: Sanctifier (the Spirit "hovers" over the Church)
- 4 Each aspect of the story is *appropriated* (assigned) to each Person, though they do not act alone but in unitary fashion (see No. 258)
- 5 Father works through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit to disclose the secret of who God is (see No. 258, 259)

D. Symbols of the Triangle and Chi Rho (see No. 236)

1. *Theologia*-the inner mysteries within the Blessed Trinity
2. *Oikonomia*-the works of God in salvation history (the economy-see No. 236)
3. Through his works, God reveals his innermost being

<p>THEOLOGIA*</p> <p>Father</p>  <p>Holy Spirit Son</p>	<p>*The <i>Pillars</i> program uses the triangle symbol to express the inner life of God and the mysteries he discloses.</p>
<p>OIKONOMIA*</p> 	<p>*The <i>Pillars</i> program uses the Chi Rho symbol to express the way in which God discloses himself in the economy (history) of salvation.</p>
<p>Old Testament New Testament The Church</p> <p><i>Age of the Father</i> <i>Age of the Son</i> <i>Age of the Holy Spirit</i></p>	

E. God as Trinity: Sketch of Trinitarian Theology

1. One God, infinite, and eternal (see No. 254)
2. Two processions (see No. 246)
 - a. Eternal generation of the Son, conceived as the Word
 - b. Spiration (or procession) of the Spirit; product of the "regard of love" between Father and Son
 - c. Perfectly expresses the divine knowing (Word) and willing (Spirit)
3. Three Persons
 - a. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—a communion of love
 - b. *Perichoresis* is the perfect dance of love of the Trinity
4. Four relations—paternity and filiation, passive and active spiration.
 - a. Paternity: Generation from Father toward Son (active)
 - b. Filiation: Generation from Son toward Father (passive)
 - c. Active Spiration: The Father and Son pouring out their love in the Spirit
 - d. Passive Spiration: The Holy Spirit's reception of that love

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS

Name: _____

From the *Catechism* Nos. 185-231

1. For whom were the first summaries of the Faith (creeds) intended?

2. The Creed is divided into three parts. To what or whom do the three parts refer?

3. To whom did God initially reveal his name ('I Am who I Am;' from which we get *Yahweh*)?

4. What is God's innermost secret?

5. What are five important implications of believing in the Trinitarian nature of God?

From the *Catechism* Nos. 232-278

6. What is the central mystery of Christian Faith and life? What does this central mystery tell us about the nature of God?

7. What two words did the fathers of the Church use to refer to "... the mystery of God's inmost life within the Blessed Trinity ..." and "... the works by which God reveals himself and communicates his life" (No. 236)?

8. What two main things does the language of the Faith indicate by calling God "Father"?

9. What Latin word that means "and the Son" remains a point of disagreement between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches?

10. God's might ("almighty") or omnipotence is the only divine attribute named in the Creed. What three characteristics does the *Catechism* distinguish within God's might?

PART 4: GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 The Church refers to the Creed as a "symbol" of faith. The Greek word *symbolon* refers to the broken half of an object that was placed together for verification and recognition (see No. 188). How does this provide insight into how the Creed impacted the relationship between believers? How has the Creed affected your own Catholic identity?
- 2 The *Catechism* discusses God's revelation of his name (see No. 203). Why is it significant that God has told us his name?
- 3 It has been said that St. Vincent de Paul credited his radical change in life to the realization that he did not know a single poor person "by name." In your own relationships, what is different and important about somebody you know by name?
- 4 In his first epistle, St. John tells us, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). In what ways have you experienced God's love?
- 5 The *Catechism* indicates that God's might is mysterious because it is "... made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9, see No. 268). How would you explain this seeming contradiction, or in what situation have you observed it to be true?

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - we thank you for the light you have given us through your Church about the innermost secret of your sublime Trinity. Grant us the grace to embrace this holy truth with our whole mind and heart until we come to enjoy the blessed vision of you in our eternal homeland, where you live and reign, one God in three Persons. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
