

Supplemental Information for  
*Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism*  
*The Profession of Faith: What We Believe*  
To group leaders of  
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs  
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#### **Session 4: “The Trinity”**

#### **Suggested Environment**

Note again that there is a recommendation for the *USCCA* to be a part of each table arrangement. You may want to drape a strip of green fabric over the table on which your environment is set to highlight we are in “ordinary time” and hence the green vestments a priest and a deacon are to wear. Since we are focusing on the Trinity in this session, you may to get inventive to find an image of the Trinity. Use Google Image and you’ll find numerous ones, one of several I used in a Power Point presentation is this endless form of a continuous three lobed string.



Just remember whatever image you want to add to your environment, caution always that when we speak of the Trinity we are heavily into analogy and mystery.

#### **Lifting Our Hearts**

From the Mass we celebrate on Trinity Sunday and so it would be good to make sure you begin this opening prayer with the sign of the Cross. Maybe you would like to suggest to become aware of how often we make the sign of the cross in our prayer life and perhaps even suggest to your group to observe how many times the sign of the cross is made during the Mass. I am always especially aware of it as I receive a blessing from the celebrant before I proclaim the Gospel. Notice how we begin Mass with the sign and receive the final blessing with that same sign, the sign of the Trinity.

## **Sharing Our Good News**

It would be good to hear what efforts individuals made to be more aware of the blessing our faith is or even in what ways they tried to “strengthen” their faith since last session.

### **Reflection One “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”**

As cradle Catholics we don’t remember the powerful beginning of our own Baptism. Perhaps someone in the group has been to a baptism lately? See if you can get them to recall for the group the very beginning; when the parents are asked for their child’s name and what they are asking of the Church. In response parents say, “Baptism,” and the priest or deacon then asks them if they understand their responsibility to raise this child in the faith. Following their “We are” the celebrant welcomes and claims the child for Christ by tracing the sign of the cross on the child’s forehead and invites parents and godparents to do the same. Ideally if the rite is followed, this takes place at the door to the church and then the child and parents are lead to the baptismal font for the remainder of the service, symbolic of now being brought into the community of believers.

The point that should be made is that we are powerfully reminded by the sign of the cross at the very beginning of our baptismal rite that each new Christian is born into the love of the Trinity. It would be good to underline the very last line of paragraph three: “At the heart of this new life [life in right relationship with God] is the love that flows between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” This doctrine of the Trinity is the central doctrine of the Christian religion. For an extensive review of the [doctrine of the Trinity in the Catholic Encyclopedia use this link.](#)

In the first paragraph on the top of page 27, I would recommend underlining beginning on the second line with the words: “...a mystery of faith is beyond understanding; it is meant to be celebrated and lived.” See if you can get some discussion going on the idea of mystery. The very person we celebrate at the center of our personal faith, Jesus Christ, has great mystery attached to his coming into our world and his significance for all of us as human beings. Here’s what a noted theologian from Australia says about the mystery of Christ:

“How is it, then, that this first century Jew from Palestine came to exert such influence on human beings and world history? Evidently, there is no simple answer to this question. In fact, the best answers are not expressed in words, but in the lives and deeds, the witness and testimony, of Jesus’ followers. In other words, it is only by risking our own lives and entering into the mystery of the Jesus-story that we can begin to understand something of the profound meaning of his life, death and resurrection for us and our world.” Gerald Hall sm, Australian Catholic University, Brisbane.

Note the common element that a mystery such as this is quite different than a puzzle to be solved. Both the life of Christ and Trinity present themselves more as a challenge of faith to be lived rather than to be solved. See if everyone is comfortable with the idea of living a mystery. I had mentioned in previous notes that sometimes the “Spotlight on the *Catechism*” boxes in

grey contain really important material and I would make certain that this one on page 27 receives emphasis. Note also that CCC, 234, and 237 should be read. Should you want to read additionally about [mystery from a theological perspective use this link](#).

The last paragraph on page 27 contains a very powerful sentence at its beginning, "Jesus revealed the mystery of the Godhead to us." Those scriptural citations that follow are just a hint of the scriptural and historical background which gave rise to the dogma of the Trinity over the next three to four centuries following the death of Christ. CCC 249 to 256 should be recommended reading and for reflection.

It is fair to say that this mystery as it is so central to Christian faith received as much thought and prayer from the early church fathers, perhaps even more so because of the linkage to the mystery of Jesus as God and man. It might help with insight to remind everyone of how much the Jews professed ONE God in contrast to the many pagan gods of their neighbors all around. So seeing God from a Trinitarian perspective required extensive development as did the use of new language and definitions and the intimate tie with the mystery of the Son becoming man. So the struggle to find adequate language to express revealed mystery continues. Perhaps a comment I made earlier in relation to revelation unfolding over time bears repeating: The idea of unfolding fits well with the idea of mystery which always draws us deeper into understanding but never can be fully understood in this life.

### **Scripture: Pondering the Word**

#### **John 14:9-21, 25-26**

9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works.

11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.

12 Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.

13 And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it.

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate <sup>8</sup> to be with you always,

17 the Spirit of truth,<sup>9</sup> which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you.

18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.<sup>10</sup>

19 In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live.

20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.

21 Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him."

25 "I have told you this while I am with you.

26 The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name--he will teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you.

Note that there are footnote links to this Biblical text from the USCCB web site. Here is a key one referring to the "Advocate" Jesus promises to send.

<sup>8</sup> [16] Another Advocate: Jesus is the first advocate (paraclete); see [1 John 2:1](#), where Jesus is an advocate in the sense of intercessor in heaven. The Greek term derives from legal terminology for an advocate or defense attorney, and can mean spokesman, mediator, intercessor, comforter, consoler, although no one of these terms encompasses the meaning in John. The Paraclete in John is a teacher, a witness to Jesus, and a prosecutor of the world, who represents the continued presence on earth of the Jesus who has returned to the Father.

### **Sharing Questions**

In addition to reflecting with the group on the question suggested, perhaps it might be interesting to see if group members have a sense of imagery associated with the persons of the Trinity. In other words, when we say the prayer Jesus taught us, "Our Father..." does someone have a very specific image in mind? I realize that such a discussion and question might require people to focus and even reveal some of their very personal prayer practices but we are not like the Muslims who forbid any imagery of any kind. As Catholics we believe that imagery helps us to point towards the reality of which the image is merely a representation (CF: CCC 2132 for a position on images). So we leave Mass every Sunday with that blessing: "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit..." what images do we take with us from that blessing to carry us

through the week?—Just an interesting thought to tie our minds to an experience we all have in common so frequently but which can mean something quite distinct and unique for each of us.

### **Reflection Two: “Central Mystery of Life”**

I think these paragraphs are well done and need little commentary other than to perhaps highlight the idea of a relational community. The sense we have of Trinity as a relational mystery and a prototype of the kind of community we hope to build in the kingdom of God here on earth certainly has its origin from our creator and underlies the entire communitarian nature of mankind. In other words, to be human is to be in community as to be God appears to be in Trinity, a community of love.

Gerald O’Collins, SJ., in a book entitled “*The Tri-personal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity*,” offers the following observation about the relationship between our understanding of God as Trinity and our understanding of our need as humans to live in community.

“The Trinity’s *koinonia* [see definition below] or absolutely blissful communion of love presents itself as the ultimate ground and goal of all other such relations-in-communion. In a world where sharing and community have often tragically broken down, the existence of the tri-personal God invites us to live in communion with each other and with our God. Because the divine life is one of total self-giving and unconditional sharing, human beings because they are made in the divine image and likeness (Gn 1:26), are invited to exist in a communion and loving solidarity with each other and with the divine persons—an invitation and grace classically expressed by the climax of Jesus’ high-priestly prayer (Jn 17:26). Wherever human beings struggle to preserve the unity of families and communities and the unity between societies and nations and do so in a way that does not suppress personal distinction, they are in fact transcribing the Trinity’s life into their moral commitment.” P. 179-180

I would simply suggest that you encourage all to underline the first sentence at the beginning of the last paragraph of this section. It begins...“We are called to be models of the Trinitarian relationship...” and I would hope some good discussion can evolve from the idea of family as a “model” of Trinitarian love as well.

### **Sharing Our Faith**

All very good questions but maybe you might challenge the group with the question: “Do you feel that there is a real community in our parish?” I would be most interested in hearing responses to that question. You see I often hear such comments as well there is the 4:30 community, the 8:00 community, the 9:30 community, the 11:00 community, the school community, the over fifty aged community, etc. I am curious as to individual thoughts and reactions to a sense of community overall at Christ the King.

## **Living the Good News**

It is possible that reflecting on community at CTK will provoke some specific actions, either group or individual. And quite honestly, we are a generous parish which responds to community needs: witness our support of St. Pat's School efforts, food bank, St. Martin's clothing and other drives, Catholic Charities Christmas tree gifts, and the list could go on. But still we should be drawn toward the ideal of always improving our communitarian selves.

## **Lifting our Hearts**

Again, you will find me encouraging each group to open up the closing to spontaneous prayer for all the variety of intentions that we always do carry in our hearts so suggest going around the room/group to ask each person present to pray for a specific intention. Be a good example and start using our CTK format: EG; For the true desire in each of our hearts to welcome the stranger into our midst and be known as a community of love, let us pray to the Lord. Group response: Lord, hear our prayer.

Addendum Note1:

One final thought from Fr. O'Collins, SJ:

“Right here and now, we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28) in the embrace of the tri-personal God, who is known through faith and prayer. Enfolded by the Trinity, we can replicate in worship Paul's experience of the divine persons that anticipates the final communion with them and the glorious consummation to come (Rom 8:9-30). Communing with the tri-personal God is, or should be, our most natural activity. In his glorified humanity, the crucified and risen Jesus has gone ahead of us all into the life of God. In our turn, we are called to share forever his presence and to enter the infinitely communicative divine love. Both here and hereafter, we can say: “Outside the Trinity there is no salvation.” Far from being an abstract speculation or doctrine to which Christians are called to pay lip service, belief in the Trinity is a matter of our human life, death, and life forever.” P. 201.

I would suggest that you ask your group to really attend to Mass this coming Sunday and look for all the times and ways we invoke the Trinity in our common community worship, in word, song and what we receive. I would also recommend you encourage your group to read CCC 266,267 in the In Brief Section of the Catechism.

*Koinonia* meaning communion by intimate participation, [further info with this link](#).

Addendum Note2: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to [allaabs@comcast.net](mailto:allaabs@comcast.net)