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THE TRIUNE GOD

“Jesus said to his disciples: If you love me, you will do as I command. Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. The Spirit will show you what is true.” (John 14:15-17 CEV)

Read

As Catholics, we practice **monotheism**, which is the belief in one God (*mono* = one, *theos* = god). However, our one God consists of three distinct persons. We call this the **Triune God**, or the **Holy Trinity**. The word “triune” means “three in one,” and God reveals himself to us as three persons in one divine being: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Triune God is the central mystery of the Christian faith. We call this a mystery because our human minds can never fully comprehend how three distinct persons can also each be entirely God. Each person in the Holy Trinity is not part of God, but wholly God. They are, however, unique in their relationship to one another. God the Father begot God the Son (but the Father did not *create* the Son; this is an important distinction). Together, God the Father and God the Son sent forth God the Holy Spirit.

Each divine person also has a unique role within the Holy Trinity. God the Father is our Creator. He created the world and everything in it out of love, and he created humans in his image. God the Son is our Savior. He is the Father’s most precious gift to us, and because of his sacrifice, we can enjoy eternal happiness in heaven. God the Holy Spirit fills us with grace and guides us as we strive to live a holy life.

There are four very important characteristics that define God, qualities that only God can possess. God is **eternal**, meaning he has always existed and will exist forever. God is **omniscient**, which means that his knowledge is infinite; he knows everything that ever was, is now, or ever will be. God is **omnipotent**, which means that his power is infinite; he can do anything. Finally, God is **omnipresent**, which means that he is everywhere, all the time.

Throughout history, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been referred to by a variety of different names. Although all three persons are God, we often use the title “God” to refer to the Father. Other titles for the Father include Yahweh (I Am), our Creator, and our Lord. Jesus is also often called “Lord,” as well as Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, our Savior, and the Messiah. Other titles for the Holy Spirit include the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of the Lord.

God reveals himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we refer to these persons using male pronouns (he, him, his). However, God is neither male nor female; he is simply spirit. Revealing himself to us this way helps us to understand the relationship among the persons of the Holy Trinity.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. How can our faith be considered monotheistic when we believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? Why is our faith not polytheistic? (Polytheism is believing in more than one god.)
2. How can Jesus be eternal and omnipresent when he was born human, lived on earth, and then died?
3. People all over the world speak about God in many different languages. What do people in other countries call God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?

Connect Choose one person of the Holy Trinity. How does he make himself present in your daily life?

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Reflect Create a dialogue in which the three persons of the Holy Trinity discuss a current event. Formulate the conversation to clearly show the role of each person and/or his relationship to the other two persons.

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THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

Read

The **Sacrament of Confirmation** is the third **Sacrament of Initiation**. Together with the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist, Confirmation completes our journey into full membership in the Church. Confirmation is important because it completes the grace we receive at baptism. During this sacrament, the Holy Spirit comes to us. He helps us grow in our faith and love of God, and gives us strength and wisdom as we work to follow Jesus.

In the early years of the Church, confirmation began when the apostles laid hands on those who were baptized, which filled them with the Holy Spirit. As time went on, the Church adopted the practice of anointing those to be confirmed with blessed **chrism** (a sacred oil). This, combined with the laying on of hands, symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Today, the Church celebrates the Sacrament of Confirmation in much the same way it was celebrated in the past. Every baptized person is able to receive this sacrament. In order to prepare for their confirmation, the candidates spend time studying the life of Jesus and developing a deeper relationship with him. They learn all they can about the Church so that they can hear God's call and live their lives as a witness to Jesus.

The bishop typically administers the Sacrament of Confirmation. It symbolizes the work of the apostles when they began confirming the faithful many years ago. During this sacrament, the bishop places his hands over the candidates' heads and prays for the Holy Spirit to come to them. He then places his hand on each candidate's head and says, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit," as he anoints them with blessed chrism. The rite concludes with the sign of peace.

Confirmation has several effects. The Holy Spirit pours into each confirmed candidate and strengthens them to publicly profess their faith in Jesus. Just like baptism, confirmation leaves a permanent mark on the recipient's soul. Confirmation completes the grace we received at baptism and increases the gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit.

As confirmed Catholics, we are expected to further the work of God on earth by demanding justice for all and respecting all of God's creation.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Why do you think confirmation candidates are required to take classes to prepare for this sacrament?
2. Can a priest preside over the Sacrament of Confirmation? Why or why not?
3. During which liturgical season is confirmation typically celebrated? Why do you think this is?

Connect In your parish, how do candidates for confirmation prepare to receive this sacrament?

Reflect As you prepare to make your confirmation, what can you do to use your time and talents to continue the work of Jesus? How will doing so help prepare you for your confirmation?

ORDER OF MASS

Read

Mass is the Church's most important celebration. It is a **sacramental**, and it always follows a specific order. Mass is divided into four main parts: Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, and Concluding Rites. Each part includes various chants, rites, prayers, and songs that help us focus on God and strengthening our relationship with Jesus.

Introductory Rites

Entrance Chant: The church comes together and we sing a song praising God.

Greeting: We pray the Sign of the Cross and the priest welcomes us.

Penitential Rite: We reflect on our sins and ask God to have mercy on us.

Gloria: We sing God a song of praise.

Collect: We pray and ask for God to hear us.

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading: We listen to the Word of God. This reading typically is from an Old Testament book.

Responsorial Psalm: We sing a song that helps us respond to the reading.

Second Reading: We listen to God's Word from the New Testament.

Gospel Acclamation: During most seasons, we sing "Alleluia" as a song of praise.

During the season of Lent, we use a different Gospel acclamation.

Gospel Reading: We stand and listen to a reading from one of the Gospels.

Homily: The priest gives a sermon that helps us understand the Word of God.

Profession of Faith: We say the Creed to proclaim our faith.

Prayer of the Faithful: We pray to God for the needs of ourselves, others, and the Church.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts: The gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar.

Prayer over the Offerings: We ask God to accept our sacrifice.

Eucharistic Prayer: This is the central point of the Mass. It includes the Preface; the Holy, Holy, Holy praise; the Consecration; the Mystery of Faith; and the Amen.

Lord's Prayer: We pray the Our Father with the congregation.

Sign of Peace: We shake hands with one another and offer peace.

Lamb of God: We pray for the Lord's forgiveness, mercy, and peace.

Communion: We receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Prayer After Communion: We pray that the Eucharist gives us strength to follow Jesus and live holy lives.

Concluding Rites

Final Blessing: We receive God's blessing.

Dismissal: The priest asks us to go in peace, giving God glory through our actions and words.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Why do you think Mass is divided into four parts? Why is each part so important?
2. Why is Mass considered to be a sacramental?
3. Think about the current liturgical season. How is this season reflected during the celebration of Mass?

Connect Other than simply attending Mass, what can you do to participate in this celebration?

Reflect Think about the homily at the last Mass you attended. What was the priest's message? How does this message relate to your life? What did you learn from it?

LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Read

The **Liturgy of the Hours**, also known as the **Divine Office**, is the daily prayer of the Catholic Church. Saint Benedict began saying this prayer with the monks of his order because he had a weekly goal of reciting the 150 songs of Psalms throughout the week.

The Liturgy of the Hours is prayed in addition to the Mass. In fact, the Liturgy of the Hours is an extension of the Liturgy of the Word, which is the first part of the Mass. The Liturgy of the Hours is publicly prayed at specific times throughout the day. The Church requires priests and members of a religious order to pray the Liturgy of the Hours on a daily basis.

Invitatory	Opening prayer; this is the first prayer of the day, and it is said in the first hour that the Divine Office opens.
Morning Prayer (Lauds)	This prayer is said in the early morning, usually at sunrise. Psalms such as 148, 149, and 150 are said during this hour. This prayer is the first of two “hinge hours,” (the most important prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours). It should be prayed with others in Church when possible.
Prime	Prayer for the first hour after sunrise.
Mid-Morning Prayer (Terce)	These are the Daytime Prayers. The Church recommends we pray at least one of these every day.
Mid-Day Prayer (Sext)	
Mid-Afternoon Prayer (None)	
Evening Prayer (Vespers)	This prayer is said at sunset. It is the second “hinge hour” and should also be prayed with others in Church when possible.
Night Prayer (Compline)	Last prayer of the night before going to sleep.
Office of Readings (Vigils)	This hour does not have an official time. The Church suggests that we use this hour to meditate and reflect on Scripture.

Each of the hours contains psalms, hymns, prayers, Scripture verses, and responses. Additionally, the hinge hours (morning prayer and evening prayer) contain intercessions. Saint Paul tells us to pray without ceasing; the Liturgy of the Hours ensures that someone, somewhere is always praying!

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Why do you think the Daytime Prayers are called Terce, Sext, and None?
2. Why is it important to say the Morning Prayer and the Evening Prayer with others when possible?
3. Why are priests and monks required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily?

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THE GOSPELS

*He said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."
(Mark 16:15)*

Read

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the first four books of the New Testament. We refer to these books as the Gospels. The word "gospel" means "good news," and the Gospels tell us the good news of Jesus Christ. The Gospels have a very special role in Sacred Scripture; through them, we learn about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the Gospels (known as the **Evangelists**) to write about the life and teachings of Jesus. Each of these authors offers a different perspective that helps us to understand the mystery of Jesus, and each book is written for a different audience.

The **Gospel of Matthew** is the first book of the New Testament. Matthew wrote this Gospel for Jews and Jewish Christians to help them recognize Jesus as the Messiah. He tells us how Jesus fulfilled the promise of the Old Testament.

The **Gospel of Mark** is the second book of the New Testament, although experts believe it was written before the Gospel of Matthew. Mark wrote this Gospel for Roman Christians to help strengthen their faith even as they faced persecution. He focuses on the miracles of Jesus in this Gospel.

The **Gospel of Luke** is the third book of the New Testament. Although Luke wrote this Gospel "to" Theophilus, his message was intended for all gentile (non-Jewish) Christians. Luke tells us that he wrote this Gospel so that his audience could be certain about their previous teachings. The Gospel of Luke focuses on Jesus as our Savior. Luke also wrote Acts of the Apostles, which is the fifth book of the New Testament and the sequel to the Gospel of Luke.

The **Gospel of John** is the fourth book of the New Testament. John wrote this Gospel for all believers. This Gospel focuses on Jesus as God (while the other three Gospels describe Jesus as Son of God). John tells us that Jesus, as God, has always and will always exist. He also tells us that Jesus is the one who made eternal life possible for us all.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Compare and contrast the Synoptic Gospels. How are the stories in the Synoptic Gospels similar? How are they different?
2. How is the Gospel of John different from the other three Gospels?
3. Do we learn about the good news of Jesus Christ anywhere besides the Gospels? Explain.

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SEVEN CAPITAL SINS & CORRESPONDING VIRTUES

Read

Human nature can lead us to develop some negative habits. These bad habits are called vices. **Vices** can cause us to focus on things other than God, leading us to deliberately turn away from him and commit sins. Vices cause us to make choices that we know in our hearts are wrong. Anytime we sin, we offend God and weaken our relationship with him.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that there are seven **capital sins**: rage, envy, gluttony, greed, lust, pride, and laziness. Because we are born with original sin, we are especially susceptible to these sins. They are the most harmful sins because they can cause us to commit other sins. The capital sins are sometimes called the **seven deadly sins** because they are deadly to the human spirit; they prevent us from fully receiving God's gift of sanctifying grace.

Fortunately, we can avoid these sins by focusing on the virtues that overpower them. A **virtue** is a good habit that helps us grow closer to God. The more we practice our virtues, the easier it is for us to use them to overcome our vices. Each of the seven deadly sins has a corresponding virtue that opposes it.

Capital Sin	Corresponding Virtue
Rage: choices and/or actions of anger, resentment, or vengeance	Forgiveness: letting go of hurt feelings
Envy: unhealthy desire for others' possessions; being excessively competitive	Kindness: being compassionate, friendly, and helpful
Gluttony: overindulgence	Temperance: practicing self-restraint
Greed: wanting or taking more than one needs	Charity: selflessly giving
Lust: acting excessively sexual	Chastity: being pure
Pride: being self-centered	Humility: being humble
Laziness: acting lazy	Diligence: working hard and with integrity

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. How might one of these capital sins lead to more sin?
2. Which of the seven capital sins do you think is considered to be the deadliest of all? Why?
3. How can a virtue overcome a sin?

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