

This year Trinity Sunday and Fathers' Day coincide. Other overlaps between religious and secular holidays may require something of a stretch to tie them together, but not this one. God is the ultimate model of Christian fatherhood. He loves us and watches over us, but also gives us the freedom to do our own thing, and when we use that freedom to make mistakes or even to stray from him, like the forgiving father in the story of the prodigal son, He receives us with open arms when we finally realize we have run off the rails. In varying degrees, earthly fathers face the challenge of doing likewise, and we all inevitably come up short.

But it is Trinity Sunday and God the Father is only one third of today's focus by the church. Theologians have filled volumes on the subject of the Holy Trinity, while most of us are satisfied to say that there is one God in three Persons - whatever that means - and let it go at that. If we are pressed, we might reply, "It's a mystery. You can't really understand it - you just have to believe it." But we can't really get off quite that easily.

The Articles of Religion at the back of the BCP are held by Anglicans to be basic statements of our faith. The fact that the very first Article is entitled "Of Faith in the Holy Trinity" should be a hint that this concept of God as three in one and one in three is not a side issue, but the starting point of our Christian faith. That's not to say, however, that the Holy Trinity is something we can easily grasp.

Without getting in over our heads, I want to spend a few minutes today looking at the church's basic teaching on the Trinity with a little help from the Roman Catholic theologian Frank Sheed. The Offices of Instruction and the Catechism in our BCP, as well as the Apostles' Creed, make reference to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but completely avoid any language regarding persons or natures, or the relationship between the three, other than that implied by the terms Father and Son. The first Article, however, gets into greater depth: "There is but one living and true God ... and in the unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

The Nicene Creed takes the subject to the next level. It refers to Jesus as "the only-begotten Son of God; Begotten of his Father before all worlds ... Begotten, not made; Being of one Substance with the Father" and then goes on to describe the Holy Ghost as one Who "proceeds" from the Father and the Son.

The most direct treatment of the Trinity, however, is in the Athanasian Creed, found in the English BCP, but not our 1928 American edition. Why is that? It's because after the Revolution, American Anglicans wanted an American version of the BCP,

replacing, for example, prayers for the British Empire and monarch with references to this country and its elected leaders. One of the men consulted was Benjamin Franklin, who suggested that Americans keep only the Apostles' Creed, since he thought the other two were too specific for free-thinking Americans.

Unfortunately, the Church made something of a compromise with Franklin, keeping the Nicene Creed, but dropping the Athanasian, which by ancient tradition was always read in churches on this Sunday, and I'm going to conclude today by reading the Athanasian Creed, but first let me share with you Sheed's 4-point outline of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which draws heavily from the Athanasian Creed, as you will hear:

1. In the one divine nature, there are three persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
2. No one of the persons is either of the others, each is wholly himself.
3. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God.
4. They are not three Gods but one God.

Sheed goes on to explain that unless we really have a clear sense of the difference between nature and person, we are just reciting a meaningless formula - it could just as easily be "three natures in one divine person."

Think about this. You and I share something called "human nature." Our *nature* defines *what* we are - human beings. We can't fly like birds or breathe under water like fish, because those abilities are not part of human nature. They are not related to *what* we are. The divine nature or substance of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit defines *what* they are - God, a different order of being from you and me.

We share human nature, with all its possibilities and limitations, but we are unique persons. Our personhood relates to *who* we are. We come in all shapes and sizes. We are not all athletes, artists, or intellectuals. Those features and abilities are not part of our human nature, but characteristics of *who* we are as persons. When we speak of the three persons of the Godhead, we refer to the differences, for example, in the ways they manifest themselves to us and interact with us, and in the roles they have played in history.

I'm going to stop there for now, and encourage you to probe deeper into the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Why bother with all of this? For the simple reason that it is the truth about God. Can we really not be interested in learning whatever we can about the God to whom we owe our very existence, and with whom we are

destined to spend eternity? Furthermore, since we are made in God's image, the more we understand of God the more we understand ourselves and each other.

Those of us who have labored in the cause of Christian unity have often heard people say that as long as we all believe in Jesus as the Son of God, we are already one - what more do we need? When Jesus prayed for our unity, he didn't pray that divided Christians would just get along with each other, but that we would be one as He and the Father are one. The Athanasian Creed makes it clear that Jesus was talking about much more than an arms-length relationship.

And now, as promised, the Athanasian Creed ...

Whosoever will be saved, before all things, it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith, which Faith except every one keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

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. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost, but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet there are not three eternals, but one eternal; as also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.

Likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty; and yet there are not three Almighties, but one. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Ghost is Lord; and yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, but not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity, none is afore or after other; none is greater or less than another; the whole Three Persons are co-eternal together, and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must think of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the right Faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the substance of his Mother, born in the world; perfect God, and perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father as touching his God-head; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he be God and Man, yet is not two but one Christ; One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give account for their own works. They that have done good shall go into life everlasting; they that have done evil into everlasting fire. This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

So there it is – the Athanasian Creed, obviously not a light read. Look it up, print it out if you like. Spend some time with it. Each time you re-read it, you may find the light around the Holy Trinity getting just a little brighter, but don't get discouraged if your progress is slow. We watched a big snapping turtle cross our yard yesterday, probably either looking for a place to lay her eggs or returning to the pond after having done so. Her journey wasn't very graceful and certainly not very fast, but she eventually reached her destination. As Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."