

## Lesson 1: God and Grace



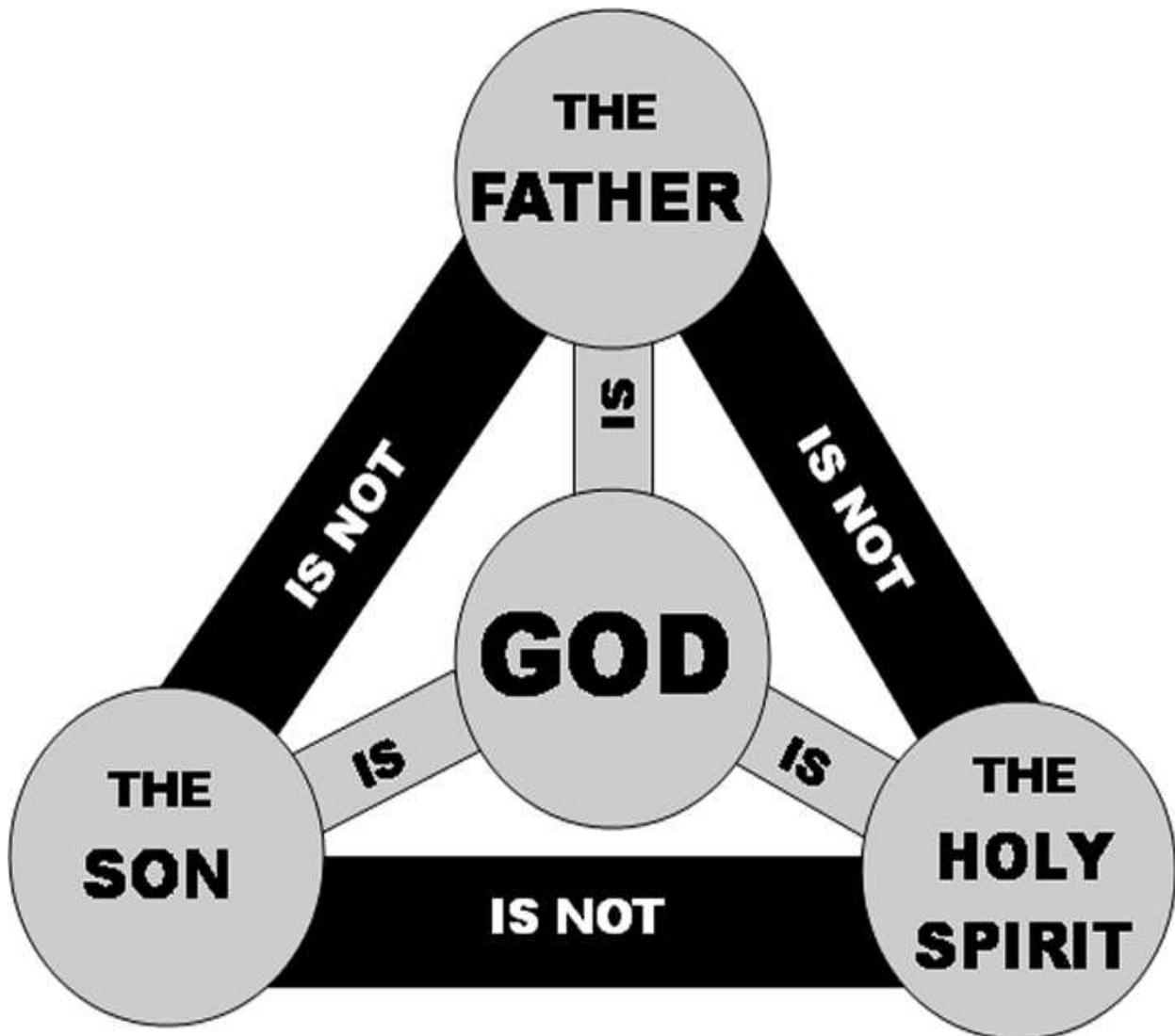
### **The Trinity**

Because God created us in His own image and likeness, we can gain a better understanding of who we are by learning more about God. For Catholics, the most powerful insight that we have about God is the Mystery of the Trinity. The Mystery of the Trinity is the very Mystery of God Himself. A "**Mystery**" of faith is a religious truth that we cannot fully understand. When using the term, "Mystery," it does not refer to a problem that needs to be solved or a typical murder mystery (*like a "Whodunit?"*). Rather, with regards to the faith, the term "Mystery" is defined as "a religious truth that we can know only through God's Revelation and that we cannot fully understand." A Mystery is something that we are called to participate in.

The Mystery of the Trinity is the easiest Mystery of our faith to sum up in words: "One God in Three Persons." However, it is the hardest Mystery to understand. The Three Persons of the Trinity are: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of these Three Persons is God, whole and entire. Each is distinct only in relationship with each of the others. The First Person of the Trinity is God the Father. God the Son is the Second Person of the Trinity. He is begotten of the Father, which means that He was not created, but rather, existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit for all eternity. The Father and the Son have always existed along with the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. He was not created either because like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit exists from before time.

The Trinity is the most important mystery of our faith and life, a mystery for us to enter into and ponder. We can state the Mystery of the Trinity in a few words: Three Persons in One God. However, even after a lifetime of studying this mystery, we will never be able to completely understand it. God is not a mystery to be solved; He is a mystery that we explore and a relationship into which we enter. This exploration of the Mystery of God can help us come to know and understand ourselves and others because we are made in God's image and likeness. It can also help us understand how to relate to others and to discover the meaning of God in our own lives.

Each Person of the Trinity is distinct from the other two, yet equally God. In other words, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. And yet, because their love for one another is so strong, they are inseparable in who they are and in what they do; there is only one God. In short, the Persons of the Trinity are distinct and inseparable like the two sides of a coin. Each side of a coin is distinct (*different or unique*), yet the two sides are inseparable (*they cannot be pulled apart or you would not have a coin*). The following diagram illustrates the Mystery of the Trinity:



Our belief in the Mystery of the Trinity (*Three Persons in One God*) does not imply that we believe in more than one God. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are all major **monotheistic** religions, which means they are based on a belief in one God. Other religions (*such as Hinduism and Buddhism*) are polytheistic which means they worship many different gods. Despite this fundamental difference, the Catholic Church respects other faith traditions.

There is only One God. This is made clear in the Old Testament (*the first part of the Bible*). The One God who created and sustains the world is the same God who chose Abraham and his descendants to be His special people. He is the same God who liberated the Hebrews (*God's chosen people*) from their slavery in Egypt. He is the God who spoke through the prophets. And He is the God who sent His Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. The New Testament (*the second part of the Bible*) reveals Three Persons in one God.



The Catholic Church realizes that the Three Persons of the Trinity have a single purpose for the human family. Each Person reveals this purpose. The actions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all for our benefit. The external works of the Trinity cannot be divided between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit since they are the same God and act in unison. However, certain activities are appropriated to One of the Persons to help us better understand the mystery of God. The Father is the Creator; the Son is the Redeemer; and the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier.

The Father is our loving Creator. God the Father created the world. He made us and everything in the entire universe. The Father continues to act in the world and in each of us in the ongoing act of creation.

The Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, shared in our humanity without loss of His divinity so that we could know and love God as our Father. God's Son, Jesus, became man in order to save us from sin and death. Through the Passion (*suffering*), Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, we are brought into God's own life. We are baptized into Christ so that we can join Him in the praise of the Father.

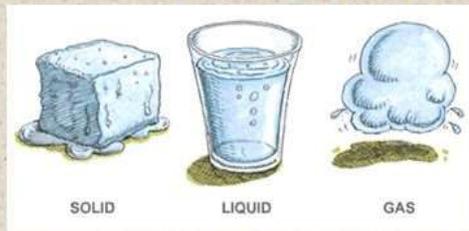
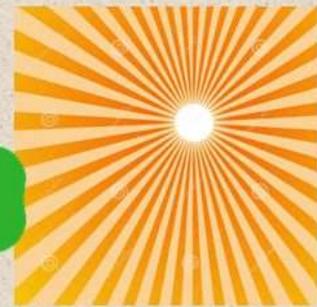
The Holy Spirit fills us with grace so that the life and love of the Father and the Son breathe within us. The gift of the Holy Spirit opens us up to faith in Jesus, who unites us with the Father. The Holy Spirit gives us the grace to believe and He helps us to understand the Mystery of God.

# Analogy Used to Describe the Trinity

An **“Analogy”** is “a comparison between two things, typically for the purpose of explanation or clarification.” Analogies are tools that we can use to explain complex realities. Since the Mystery of God is impossible to explain, the Church often uses analogies to help the faithful get a better understanding of the mysteries of the faith. Note that all analogies are limited in nature and cannot fully cover the complexity of the reality that is being explained, especially when it comes to the mysteries of our faith and the Mystery of God. The following diagram illustrates the most common analogies used to help us get a better (*or basic*) understanding of the Mystery of God (*the Mystery of the Trinity*):

Analogy help us understand the mystery of the Trinity:

1. St. Patrick used a 3-leaf clover.
2. St. Augustine said God is like the Sun – the Father is like the orb of the sun, Jesus like the rays that reach out to Earth, and the Holy Spirit like the sun’s warmth.
3. Water (H<sub>2</sub>O) exists as solid (ice), liquid, gas (steam) – but all 3 are H<sub>2</sub>O.
4. An apple has skin, fruit, core – but it is still an apple.



St. Patrick, the Patron Saint of Ireland, used the shamrock, or three-leaf clover, to illustrate the Trinity. Each of the three leaves represented One Person of the Trinity (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*). Just as the three-leaves make one shamrock; so the Three Persons of the Trinity comprise our One God.

St. Augustine used the analogy of the Sun. The Sun has three elements: its orb, its rays, and its heat. He compared the Father to the orb, the Son to the rays, and the Holy Spirit

to the warmth. Just as we need all three elements (*the orb, the rays, and the warmth*) to experience the full reality of the sun, so we need all Three Persons of the Trinity for the One God.

Water is another item used to explain the Trinity. The chemical composition of water is H<sub>2</sub>O. Depending on the temperature, water can exist in three different forms: solid (*ice*), liquid (*water*), and gas (*steam*). However, no matter which form water is in (*solid, liquid, or gas*), its chemical composition remains the same (H<sub>2</sub>O). The Trinity is Three Persons in One God and each Person is God; hence each Person in the Trinity is Divine.

Another more recent analogy for the Trinity is that of an apple. An apple is composed of three things: the outer skin, the fleshy fruit, and the seeds. The outer skin would represent God the Father, who is known for His Fatherly care and protection. The outer skin protects the apple. The fleshy fruit represents the Son, who gave His Flesh (*the sacrament of the Eucharist*) as the food that nourishes us. The apple's seeds produce growth since with them a new apple tree can come to life. The seeds represent the Holy Spirit, who works for the growth of the Church and the individual's growth in holiness.



When it comes to the Mystery of the Trinity, God invites us to come closer and to experience fully His Love through the gift of faith. This faith is connected to the faith community. It is in and through the Church that our faith is received, supported, and nourished. The Church helps our faith grow when we pray, participate in Mass, and receive the sacraments. In faith, we turn to the One God who gave us all that we have. God is our ultimate and eternal goal, the One for whom we will always reach and the most important relationship in our lives.

One of the fundamental teachings of the faith on the Trinity is: **God is Love**. Saint Teresa of Calcutta states, "Where there is Love, there is God." The converse holds true as well: "Where there is God, there is Love." When we give the gift of love, we give the gift of God. Likewise, when we give the gift of God (*the gift of our faith*), we give the gift of Love.

## The Trinity in Art

From the earliest times, the idea of the Trinity was difficult to understand. In trying to portray the Trinity, iconographers, artists who design **icons** (*religious images*), turned to the story of the hospitality of Abraham when three wanderers visited him.

**Read about Abraham's visit:**

**Genesis 18:1-15**

The following picture is a photo of Andrei Rublev's Icon that captures this encounter:



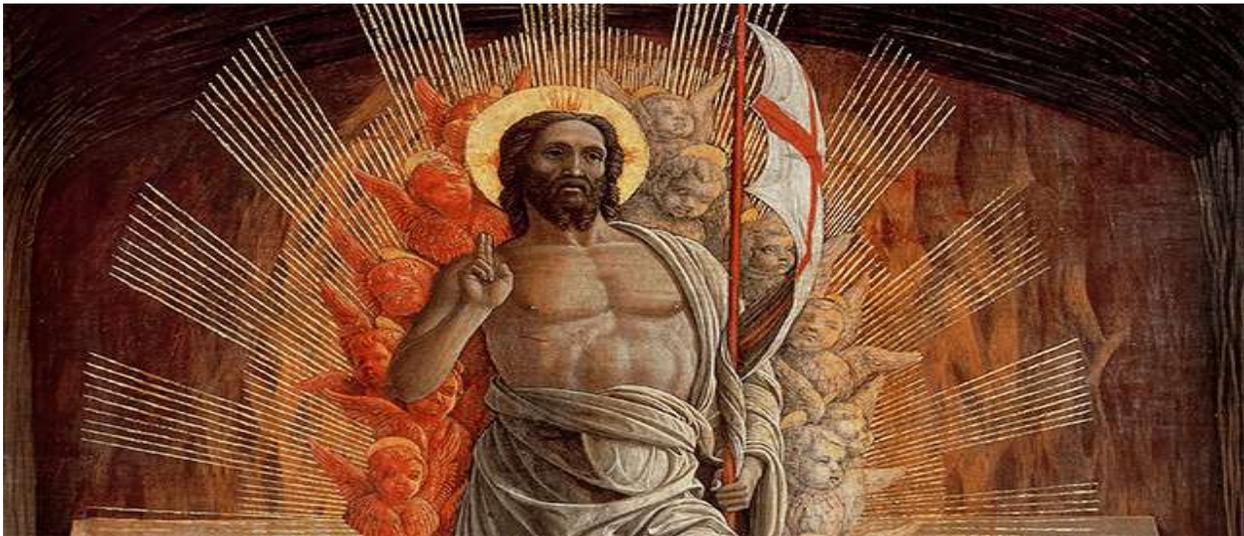
Iconographer Andrei Rublev represents the Trinity through three figures that visited Abraham. This icon shows the unique nature of the Trinity and the Eucharist as a symbol of unity and divine love. Rublev designs a wordless way to appreciate the Mystery of the Trinity by setting the three haloed figures within a circular pattern, making their faces identical, and including a blue garment signifying divinity.

# God the Father



God the Father is the Creator of Heaven and Earth. He begets the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. The Father is benevolent, merciful, loving, and gives in superabundance. Our mission in life is to fulfill the will of the Father. God created us with **Free Will** which is the ability to choose to do good and stay in relationship with God or to choose sin which distances us from God.

# God the Son



The Son of God takes on our human nature in the person of Jesus Christ; this is called the mystery of the **Incarnation**. As one theologian said, "Jesus is the human face of God." Jesus is true God and true Man; hence Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Therefore, his humanity and divinity co-exist without confusion, change, division, or separation. Jesus' human will and intellect are in perfect union with his divine will and

intellect. Whatever can be said of Jesus as a man can be said of Jesus as God. Jesus brings about the Salvation and Redemption of the human race through his **Paschal Mystery**, which is his Passion (*Suffering*), Death, and Resurrection.

### The Incarnation Exchange

Through the Incarnation, Jesus makes some exchanges with us that have eternal benefits. It is through this Incarnation Exchange that Jesus says to mankind:

*“You give Me your humanity, I will give you My Divinity.  
You give Me your time, I will give you My Eternity.  
You give Me your bonds, I will give you My Omnipotence.  
You give Me your slavery, I will give you My Freedom.  
You give Me your death, I will give you My Life.  
You give Me your nothingness, I will give you My All.”*

## God the Holy Spirit



The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity. He is co-equal with the Father and the Son and therefore He is worshiped and glorified with them. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The principle work of the Holy Spirit is **Sanctification**; in other words, the Holy Spirit is the One who makes us holy. Some of the biblical images used to represent the Holy Spirit are: a dove, oil, wind, breath, fire, tongues, an olive branch, and water.

One of the most common symbols of the Holy Spirit is a **dove**. It comes from the story of Jesus' baptism, when Jesus saw "the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him."

**Fire** is another popular representation of the Holy Spirit. The fire that appeared on Pentecost was reminiscent of the burning bush on Mount Sinai from which God spoke to Moses. During the Exodus, the people of God were led by a pillar of fire at night. Fire

calls attention to the strength and force of the Holy Spirit. Fire also emphasizes the enlightenment which we receive from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is also represented by **wind**. In fact, the original Hebrew and Greek words for “Spirit” can be translated as “wind.” The wind that appeared on Pentecost was reminiscent of the wind that blew over the waters at the beginning of Creation. The wind calls attention to the Holy Spirit breathing life into the Church.

**Water** signifies birth and life. From a faith perspective, it represents the cleansing and life-giving action of the Holy Spirit at Baptism. The symbolism of water is addressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#694):

*As “by one Spirit we were all baptized,” so we are also “made to drink of one Spirit.” Thus the Spirit is also personally the living water welling up from Christ crucified as its source and welling up in us to eternal life.*

The **cloud** is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit because clouds provide life-giving water. In the Old Testament, God often leads His people with a column of cloud and appears to them in a cloud. The image of a cloud is often combined with the image of light to symbolize the God who is hidden and mysterious but also revealing and luminous.

**Anointing with oil** is a symbol of the Holy Spirit’s uniting us with Jesus, the Messiah, the Anointed One. We are anointed with oil during the Sacrament of Confirmation and thus sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

## **Doxology**

A “**Doxology**” is a prayer of praise to the Trinity (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*). At Mass, the Eucharistic Prayer ends with a doxology of praise and adoration of the Trinity. The “Glory Be” Prayer is another great example of a Doxology.





**Grace** is defined as God's favor; it is the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to His call (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1996). Grace is a participation in the life of God (*CCC* #1997). God gives us His grace so we can participate in the very Mystery of His Being. When we need help, strength, and support to accomplish a task or endure a difficult time, God is there to bestow on us His grace, that is, a share in His divine power and life.

Grace that helps us make choices to live as God wants us to live is called **Actual Grace**. We don't need to be going through hardship to ask for and receive God's grace. Actual Grace is given to us for special works. We need them to do good works and to resist temptations. We may, for example, begin our day by asking God for His grace to help us do His work throughout the day. We may ask for God's grace to help us concentrate in class, at work, or to lend depth of feeling to our prayers.

Grace is a deep and intimate connection between God and us. Grace is the gift of God's own self to humans. It makes us capable of living in God's love and acting in that love in our daily lives.

**Sanctifying Grace** is God's very life within us; it is an entirely free gift of God that justifies the sinner. Sanctifying Grace makes us participants in the life of the Trinity and members of the Body of Christ (*the Church*). It infuses the theological virtues (*faith, hope, charity*) in us. Sanctifying Grace is imparted to us first through the Sacrament of Baptism and produces in us a permanent condition in which we are pleasing to God as His children. Through the state of Sanctifying Grace, we participate in God's divine spirituality. Sanctifying Grace is necessary for salvation and can be lost through mortal sin; it is recovered by turning back to God through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

We are designed by God to live in goodness by using our freewill to choose what is right. To assist us in our inclination and capacity for good, God gives us **Habitual Grace**. Habitual Grace gives us the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God's call. **Sacramental Grace** is given to us through the sacraments of the Church. This grace will vary depending on the sacrament received.

God's gift of grace to us is unique and special. It cannot be bought, bargained for, traded for, or even earned by a particular number of good deeds. God alone bestows the gift of grace freely and unconditionally, because God gives this gift out of His abundant love for us.

Grace is without limit and without quantity. God's grace is a gift, freely given and not earned. With God's grace we live in His love and make decisions about our actions that will lead us to do what is good.

