

LESSON 4: THE HOLY TRINITY AND COMMUNION

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 7	:	Cover points 1 to 3
For Intermediate Level / Age 10	:	Cover points 1 to 6
For Advanced Level / Age 13	:	Cover points 1 to 9

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we discovered that God has introduced Himself to mankind through the Holy Catholic Church. He has revealed Himself through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, both of which are protected by the Sacred Magisterium. In this lesson, we will learn one of the most important things that God has revealed about Himself in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, that is, His nature as a communion of three Persons in one God.

Current lesson:

1. The Bible affirms that there is only ONE God. It does not affirm the power of other sovereign gods. It speaks of only one sovereign God right from the beginning of creation.

Deuteronomy 6:4: “Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh.”

Psalms 86:10: “For you are great and do marvellous deeds, you, God, and none other.”

I Corinthians 8:4: “...there is no God other than the One.”

Galatians 3:20: “...yet God is one.”

2. At the same time, the Bible also affirms that there are three distinct but equal Persons who are God.

A) The Father is God.

Ephesians 4:5, 6: “There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, over all, through all and within all.”

B) The Son is God.

John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

C) The Holy Spirit is also God.

Acts 13:2: “One day while they were offering worship to the Lord and keeping a fast, the Holy Spirit said, ‘I want Barnabas and Saul set apart for the work to which I have called them.’”

3. The Bible brings the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together in such a way as to assert that they are a unity in their divinity made up of three separate Persons. The term that has come to be used to describe this tri-unity of God is “Trinity”.

Matthew 28:19: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”

2 Corinthians 13:13: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

1 Peter 1:1-2: “Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ, to all those living as aliens in the Dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen, in the foresight of God the Father, to be made holy by the Spirit, obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

4. Saint Augustine of Hippo (Bishop in North Africa, 4th century) also described the union between the Father and the Son in great detail. He attributes this union between the Father and the Son to the role of the Holy Spirit as the “Giver of Community”.
5. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (Archbishop of Constantinople, 4th century), one of the famous Cappadocian Fathers, used the Greek term *περιχώρησις* (*perichoresis*) to describe the relationship of the three Persons of the triune God to one another. The term *perichoresis* indicates that there was a “mutual indwelling” and “dancing around”. The ancient Church Fathers constantly described the eternal God, in the three Persons, as doing the Great Dance.
6. The Church Fathers, all throughout the history of the Church, have defended the truth of God’s Trinitarian nature that is reflected in Sacred Scripture. Many wrong teachings about the Trinity have also been rejected, such as Monarchianism, Subordinationism, and Tritheism, among others.

Tertullian, *Against Praxeas 2*, 216 AD: “We do indeed believe that there is only one God, but we believe that under this dispensation, or, as we say, *oikonomia*, there is also a Son of this one only God, his Word, who proceeded from him and through whom all things were made and without whom nothing was made... We believe he was sent down by the Father, in accord with his own promise, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father and the Son, and in the Holy Spirit...”

Augustine of Hippo, *The Trinity 1:4:7*, 408 AD: “All the Catholic interpreters of the divine books of the Old and New Testaments whom I have been able to read, who wrote before me about the Trinity, which is God, intended to teach in accord with the Scriptures that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same substance constituting a divine unity with an inseparable equality; and therefore there are not three gods but one God, although the Father begot the Son, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, himself, too, coequal to the Father and to the Son and belonging to the unity of the Trinity.”

St Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 8, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*: If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.

7. The Holy Catholic Church says that there is one God, expressed in three Persons. Our belief in the Holy Trinity cannot be reduced into a mathematical argument of how three can be one, or one can be three. God is One in the kind of Being that He is, but three in the number of Persons that are found in His Being.

This is not a contradiction, but rather, a description of the *communio* (community) that is God. God is a community of Persons sharing in perfect love. In the Bible, that relationship was most eloquently described through the words that Jesus used when He spoke to His Father about those who had followed Him:

John 17:20-23, 26: “I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me. May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity that the world will recognise that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you have loved me... I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them.”

8. God desires to bring us into His Trinitarian relationship so that we can share in His life and His perfect love. Those who have been initiated into His life and share in it are part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.
9. A prayer by St Augustine of Hippo (*De Trinitate*, 15:28):

“O Lord our God, we believe in You, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For the Truth would not say, ‘Go, baptise all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’, unless You were a Trinity. Nor would You, O Lord God, bid us to be baptised in the name of Him who is not the Lord God. Nor would the divine voice have said, ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God’, unless You were so a Trinity as to be one Lord God.”



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