

## The Trinity: An Attack on Reason?

By Bishop Victor Galeone

*In the east transept of our Cathedral, there's a stained glass window that depicts St. Augustine talking to a little child. Legend has it that this encounter took place when he was writing his book on the Trinity.*

One day while walking along the seashore, Augustine came upon a child dipping water from the sea and pouring it into a hole in the sand. Curious, the bishop inquired, "What are you doing?" The child replied, "I'm going to pour the ocean into this hole I dug." Augustine smiled: "You're wasting your time. That's impossible!" To which the child said, "I will accomplish this before your finite mind can comprehend the infinite Godhead," and then vanished.

For this month's message I would like to attempt the impossible - to discuss the mystery of the Trinity. The term itself does not appear in the Bible. But the concept of what the Trinity means is quite apparent in the New Testament.

At the end of his prologue, St. John states emphatically: "No one has ever seen God. His one and only Son, who is closest to the Father's heart, came to make him known." (Jn. 1:18)

By taking on our human nature in Mary's womb, the Son's divinity did not take the place of Jesus' soul. In addition to his human body, Jesus had a real human soul.

Would that make Jesus two persons then, one human and the other divine? No, Jesus is the only one person, and that person - existing from all eternity - is divine. In that one divine person two distinct natures were joined: the human and the divine.

Before continuing, let's define our terms.

**Person:** someone who can think and choose. Even a five-year-old who shouts, "Mom, there's somebody at the door," knows the difference between a person and a dog.

**Nature:** the source of our actions. For example, birds can fly but we can't. It's not in our nature. How do nature and person differ? "Nature" says what we are; "person" says who we are. Nature is the source of our actions, while it's the person who does them.

Now by coming together in one person, Jesus' two natures did not combine like hydrogen and oxygen do to form water. For in water, hydrogen and oxygen lose their individual qualities, while in Jesus, his two natures continue to maintain their distinct properties.

Thus, at the tomb of Lazarus it's the same divine person who shed tears in his human nature, and then called out, "Lazarus, come forth" in his divine nature.

Now let's return to the mystery of the Trinity. We have already seen in a previous message that Jesus made some extraordinary claims that no devout Jew would ever have made if he were a mere mortal.

For example: "Your sins are forgiven." / "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." / "Whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me" / "Before Abraham came to be (2,000 years ago!), I AM.

We then saw how the bodily resurrection of Jesus authenticated his claims; for God would never have brought an imposter back to life.

When we further consider that Jesus:

Professed only one God (Mk. 12:29) ,  
claimed equality with that one God,  
called God his own Father 150 times,  
called himself God's only Son,  
then the only conclusion possible is that the Father and the Son are the same God.

Jesus himself clearly said so in John 10:30, "The Father and I are not one." That is, we two separate divine persons are identically one in being. Let's examine what this means.

From all eternity, God knows himself. In that self-knowledge, he conceives the person that St. John, in the verse of his Gospel, calls the Word, whom he later identifies as the Son.

God is pure spirit, so when he conceived his Son, he did not give just a part of himself - like a human father does with his sperm - no, he gave his entire self to his Son. So from all eternity, we have two separate persons who were together in one and the same nature: the Thinker, the Thought/ the Speaker, the Word/ the Father, the Son.

These two divine persons always loved each other with an all-consuming love. Their mutual Love is the Holy Spirit - the third person of the Blessed Trinity. As we pray in the Creed, "We believe in the Holy Spirit...who proceeds from the Father and the Son."

The Holy Spirit is also true God. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus commissions the disciples, "Go...baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Since the Father and the Son are God, the Holy Spirit must also be the same God. For a normal person would never join three disparate entities in the same breath. That would be like a person saying, "I want you to meet three friends of mine: Peter, Paul, and John's foot."

And now let's make this rather intellectual discussion practical for our lives. God is a communion of three Divine Persons. He has no need of any creature. Accordingly, creation was an act of boundless love on his part by wishing to communicate his goodness to us. When we rejected his love through deliberate sin, God did not abandon us to death, but rather sent his only son to be our Savior. During his time on earth, Jesus revealed God's inner life to us. What's more, he revealed God's great desire to share that life with us through faith and baptism. Thus we are adopted into God's own family!

I close with this passage from Pope Leo the Great: "Christian, remember your dignity; and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sin...Through the sacrament of baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive away so great a guest by evil conduct, and thus become again a slave to the devil; for your liberty was bought with the blood of Christ."