

LIVING WITH CHRIST THIS WEEK

Sunday, May 30: Trinity Sunday (C) - white
Monday 31: Visitation of Mary - white
Tuesday, June 1: St. Justin, martyr - red
Wednesday 2: Ferial - green
Thursday 3: St. Charles Lwanga and companions, martyrs - red
Friday 4: Ferial - green
Saturday 5: St. Boniface, bishop, martyr - red
Sunday 6: The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (C) - white



The Experience and Mystery of the Blessed Trinity

4. Understanding the Trinity

Very early on, the Christian faith was attacked as often by pagans as by Jews. The latter reproached the early Christians for what they thought was a perversion of Abraham's monotheistic faith, since the Christians believed there were three persons in one God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. During the 2nd century, the Church reflected on the Trinitarian mystery and set out to explain and defend it. Despite numerous councils that tried to come to a consensus and definition, there were lengthy debates that tore the Church apart for over three centuries.

FIRST TENTATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Some of the first attempts to explain the Trinitarian mystery consisted in saying that "Father, Son, Spirit" were more or less various "manifestations" of God's presence in our world, somewhat like a mother whose maternal duties included being a nurse, a cook and a teacher for her children. This understanding was inaccurate and was never affirmed by New Testament Scriptures where the Father and Son are revealed as truly distinct from one another.

Another explanation responded by saying that the Son and the Holy Spirit were supernatural *extensions* created by God to interact with humanity. In addition to contradicting many scriptural references in the New Testament, this *rationalization* only succeeded in raising more questions about God's nature and Christ's mission to save humanity through his death on the cross.

THE WRITINGS OF ST. BASIL

It was St. Basil, the Bishop of Caesarea (d. 379), who established a *logical* basis to help us understand the Trinity. St. Basil based his thoughts on an analysis of the Greek language and philosophical concepts. He explained there were two types of terms: *absolute* and *relative*. For example, if we say: Paul is Patrick's father, Paul and Patrick are *absolute* terms because they designate someone who exists as an individual, whatever his age or civil state (married, single, etc). On the other hand, *father* is a *relative* term: it expresses a relationship between Paul and Patrick. Thus with the Trinity, "Father, Son and Spirit" express relationships but not absolutes. *In God there is only one nature, an indivisible absolute*. But since relationships in God are eternal, the Father has always existed as Father. Using our example, Paul and father are synonymous.

These debates took place at the Council of Constantinople (381) which provided the most complete expression of Christian faith in the *Nicene Creed*, which summarized the dogma of the Trinity for both eastern and western rites. We proclaim this Creed in our Sunday liturgical assemblies.

Georges Madore, s.m.m.

Translated by Honore Kerwin Borrelli