

Holy Trinity Yr A: The Holy Trinity as an Icon for the Family

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Today the Church celebrates the central mystery of our Catholic Faith: the Most Holy Trinity - one God, but three distinct Persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – all three who are co-equal, all who are co-eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and . . . all loving.

We express our belief in this great mystery when we say the sign of the cross: in the **Name** of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – name being in the singular – to signify only one God.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not one person with three different names - that's actually a heresy that was condemned in the early Church.

Muslims accuse us of being polytheists – believing in three gods.

No, but we do believe that there are truly three distinct Persons in the Trinity.

So, what is it that makes the three divine Persons distinct? It is their **relations** with one another, which are **eternal**.

What do I mean by this? God the Father is unbegotten; as such, He is the **Source** of the Trinity – not in succession of time, but from all eternity.

How so? God the Father eternally begets, or generates, the Son, who is the Word. (cf. Jn. 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God”).

In knowing ourselves, we generate words and ideas; so likewise with God the Father. But God the Father has known Himself perfectly from all eternity, and His self-knowledge is so perfect, it's another Person – of the same nature, or substance, as God the Father (just as our own self-knowledge is in a way distinct from our mind, but one with us, with our human nature).

This is why we profess in the Creed that we believe God the Son is **consubstantial** – or **of the same substance** – as God the Father.

God the Father has from all eternity begotten the Son; He does so now, and always will - because He has always known Himself perfectly, and always will.

Now, where does the Holy Spirit enter in?

Well, from all eternity there has been a mutual, infinite, and perfect love between God the Father and God the Son – so perfect, in fact, that it, too, is another person: the Holy Spirit, who in theology is called the **Fruit** of the love between the Father and the Son.

From all eternity the Father and the Son, in their mutual love, have breathed forth the third divine Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit – who proceeds from their mutual love.

This is precisely why we say in the Creed that we believe the Holy Spirit **proceeds** from the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit is also called the divine **Person of Love** in the Trinity, because from all eternity the Holy Spirit **receives** the mutual love of the Father and the Son, and **returns** that love, fructifies it – in the One God who IS LOVE – each divine Person giving Himself totally to the other Persons in love.

So, to sum up the eternal relations of the three divine Persons in the Trinity: God the Father begets or generates; God the Son is eternally begotten, and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from their mutual love.

We are made in God's image and likeness. God is Love; and we are made to love in the manner of divine love: giving ourselves in love totally to others, as the divine Persons give of themselves totally to one another, in love.

It is for this reason that theologians have proposed that the Triune or three-personed God, the Holy Trinity – the infinitely perfect divine society, is

the perfect model or icon of the family – the fundamental and original human society.

One such theologian is the Ven. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen - the first televangelist. Archbishop Sheen wrote what I consider the greatest work ever composed on marriage and the family. The title: Three to Get Married. The basic premise of the book is that all authentic love is triune – having its source in God: three-personed love.

Applied to marriage, Sheen said that it takes three to get married, because it takes three to love: the man, the woman, and God.

The Vatican II recognized this truth: The document On the Church in the Modern World teaches that, “Authentic married love is caught up into divine love” (GS 48).

In 3 to Get Married, Archbishop Sheen emphasizes that “if love were only mutual self-giving, it would end in exhaustion, or else become a flame in which both would be consumed. . . .”

And just as divine love is eternally and infinitely fruitful in the Person of the Holy Spirit, so the love between husband and wife is designed by God to produce fruit: the child, who proceeds from the mutual love of husband and wife, in cooperation with divine love: it is God that creates a completely unique immortal soul and infuses it into the embryo, making it a human being.

Here is how Archbishop Sheen says it:

“As the Three Divine Persons do not lose their personality in their oneness of essence but remain distinct, so the love of husband and wife leaves their souls distinct. As from the love of the Father and the Son proceeds a third distinct person, the Holy Spirit, so in an imperfect way, from the love of husband and wife, there proceeds the child who is a bond of union which gives love to both in the spirit of the family.”

SHEEN: Even those without faith speak of their mutual love in the third person. They say "our love." They speak of love as if love were a third person common to them, belonging to them, and uniting them in a mysterious way. They are paying tribute without knowing it, to the mystery-model of their union. This Third Person, *altissimum donum Dei*, is also given to human beings to unite them in love, in the measure that the couple accepts it as the "spirit" of their union. Marriage is a trinity even when no child proceeds from it through no fault of the parents. But if the child comes, then love is made incarnate.

Yes, we can truly say that **the child is the enfleshment** of the love of husband and wife in cooperation with divine love.

I'll quote Sheen once again:

“The Sacrament of Marriage, because it is life-giving love and love-giving life, is the image of the Trinity. As the riches of the Holy Spirit of Love are at the disposal of those who live under His impulse, so marriage, lived as God would have it lived, associates partners to the creative joy of the Father, to the self-sacrificing love of the Son, and to the unifying love of the Holy Spirit.”