

The Basics of Orthodoxy Class 101

St. Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Church, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Review of last week: Trinity, Incarnation and Theosis (sign of cross)

Topic 3: The Holy Trinity (part 1)

**God is not an impersonal concept—(a philosophical big “Idea”)—
nor is God an impersonal energy—(like Star War’s “Force”)
nor is God an isolated individual—(like the “God” of Islam)
nor is God a group of individual gods—(like in Mormonism);
But God—as He has revealed Himself to us in history, experience, in the Scriptures
and personally, in Jesus Christ:**

God is the Father, a Divine Person,

Who exists in an eternal communion of love with

His equally Divine Only-begotten Son (the Logos, His Word), and

His equally Divine Holy Spirit (His “breath”).

“The Church confesses precisely this: that there are three co-equal and co-eternal Persons in one undivided Godhead, and that these three Persons are one God and not three.” (p.53, *Faith*)

For the Orthodox, the Most Holy Trinity is the unshakable foundation of all our religious teaching and our religious experience.

This teaching we accept because Christ revealed it to us,
and the Disciples and the Apostolic Fathers passed it down to us.

It is not rational that “1+1+1=1”. It is hard for our human rational to understand this.
It transcends the capabilities of our limited mind. (Yet note, “1x1x1=1”)

Yet, the teaching remains Reality. It is Truth. We do not have to understand everything to believe it. Does a wife understand everything about her husband before she commits to him in marriage, and vice-versa? No. But the experience of marriage remains real.

The teaching of the Holy Trinity is a “cross for human ways of thought.”

It is good that we have a God Who has revealed Himself to us to be incomprehensible. Otherwise, if we think we can know everything about God, we have made an idol.

God remains a Reality which is forever beyond our comprehension—bigger than our mind—just like the ocean remains a reality to be experienced by the little boy with his sand bucket and hand shovel. Yet, scoop as much water as he can, he can never scoop up all the seawater of the ocean into his little bucket. God is beyond our limited

understanding. We cannot grasp all of Him in our words or ideas, yet we can experience Him and know something about Him, as He reveals Himself to us.

Thus, God is **transcendent and immanent** at the same time. Transcendent, meaning, His Divine Uncreated Nature is existing far beyond our limited created faculties of understanding, far above and beyond created existence itself. Yet, He is also immanent, meaning, “operating within,” “pervading and sustaining the universe” by His Grace. God is not “locked” within His ultimate transcendence, but as Almighty, He can reach out and down to us creatures and manifest His Presence (His Grace and Energy) among us, just like the sun is able to kiss the earth each day with its sunlight and energies, which bring life to the planet, but the sun is not the same as the earth.

Learning and studying about the Holy Trinity is fearful. One must be careful. We are not dealing with ideas only, but with God Himself. It is like trying to study and work on the electrical wiring of your house, with the current ON. The wires are live.

The truths that we are to examine today are **reality** and they are “**live**”.

Why do we believe in the Trinity?

Because Jesus **revealed** the Trinity to us.

“The Lord came, not to do something easy, but to do something true. He came to bring truth and life.” (p 42, *Hymn of Entry*)

“The truth that Christ came to reveal is the truth about Who God is, and the life that He came to give to mankind is nothing less than the life of the Holy Trinity.” (p.54, *Faith*)

Why was Jesus persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders and killed?

Because He identified Himself with God:

- 1) “**I and my Father are one.**” John 10:30
- 2) At the Baptism of Christ, the voice of the Father was heard, saying:
“This is **My beloved Son**, in Whom I am well pleased.” Matt. 3:17
The Holy Spirit came down on the Son bodily in the form of a dove. Thus, the Most Holy Trinity was revealed at Christ’s Baptism, at the very start of His earthly ministry.
- 3) Christ called Himself by God’s Old Testament Name: “I AM” Exodus 3:14
Jesus said: “**Before Abraham was, I AM**”. John 8:58
- 4) Jesus said: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working. Therefore, the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that **God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.**” John 5:17-18

The **summary of Christ’s teaching** is that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is One and Three, at the same time: The Father, Who eternally begets His Son and eternally breathes forth His Spirit.

He is not a single, self-contained individual, in love with Himself—the ultimate egoist—but “He is trinity (tri-unity): three equal Persons, each one dwelling in the other by virtue of an unceasing movement of mutual love.” (p.27, *The Orthodox Way*)

In what way is God “Three” and in what way is God “One”?

God is incomprehensible, invisible, inexpressible, ever-existing, eternally the same. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, all-present. He always is, always was, and always will be.

He has one Divine Nature
one Divine Power
one Divine Will

Each Divine Person shares this Nature, Will, Power freely and equally.

(Three Candles example) What part of the flame was not shared with the other two?

The Father eternally shares His One Divine Nature, Will, and Power with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Christ said to His Father: “All that is Mine is Thine and all that is Thine is Mine.”
John 17:10

How is God not three “gods” in the same way that three people who share the same human nature are three men?

Father, Son, & Holy Spirit:

Three Divine Persons

One Nature

Jesus said: “I and the Father are one.” John 10:30

One Power

One Will

Jesus said: “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do.” John 5:19

Tom, Rick, and Harry:

three human persons

one human nature

three powers

three wills

Even though Tom, Rick and Harry share one human nature, because they each have their own separate powers and wills, they can decide to fight, to walk away from each other, to each go their own separate ways—to really be three separate beings.

However, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—ever united in a perfect communion of love, sharing one Nature, one Power, one Will—do **not** have three wills as three gods or three men would have, and so they can not go their separate ways.

Jupiter, Venus, Mars (three gods)

Three divine persons

One nature

Three powers

Three wills Having three separate wills, these three gods are really three, not one.