

Understanding the Holy Trinity

Objectives

To understand the Holy Trinity and know our belief in the theology and the work of the three Hypostases

References

“God” by Father Tadros Malaty

Scriptural Verse

“For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one” (1 John 5: 7)

Lesson Guidelines

Who is God?

- "God is love" (1 John 4:8). He is the Lover of mankind and wants to be united with him. His love is ever working and shall never cease until the last coming of Christ
- He created man in His image as the most perfect of His creation on earth and used to speak with Adam as a beloved friend (Gen. 3:8)
- Even after the fall, He talked to Abraham declaring His divine plan, saying, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" (Gen. 18:17)
- God, who is incomprehensible, reveals Himself, His nature, His mysteries, and His will to His beloved with whom He desires to be in contact
- He speaks to mankind through His creation (Rom. 1:20), (Ps. 19:1) etc...
- God presented His written Law through Moses, and sent His prophets to prepare the way for His Son Who came and revealed to us the divine mysteries (Heb.1:1, 2)

How can we know God?

- God cannot be known by wisdom (1 Cor. 1:21) but by revelation grace and faith.
- God revealed Himself to us. It is our responsibility to enjoy this divine knowledge, by studying, researching, and purifying our souls and hearts
- When we speak of God, we try to express the divine and incomprehensible by human language. So “Monotheism” cannot be understood as “numbering” for God is not subject to mathematical rules; the same for “love” is not like human emotions
- We cannot accept God as a solid being unable to bring forth! Energetic Essence has to bring forth something (Fire brings forth light and produces heat; human mind brings forth thoughts), God eternally brings forth the Son “Light from Light” A light that brings forth no light is darkness. Jesus Christ is the brightness of God’s glory "(Heb. 1:3)

Preaching God in Christianity

- Christianity did not attack religions but used their words as a starting point to preach the biblical Truth. St Mark did so with Anianus and St Paul did the same in Athens “The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23)

- With the simple people, Christian preachers used simplicity, and with the philosophers or the heretics, they used philosophy to win all (1 Cor. 9:20)
- They preached God through His redeeming deeds and not through theoretical discussions (St Mark healed Anianus in the name of Jesus Christ as a starting point to preach)
- Our Lord neither spoke to us in theological terms nor set a Trinitarian formula of faith. He simply revealed to us the Holy Trinity through Their saving deeds

He revealed the Father as the Creator (Source of Life) the Lover of mankind who sent His Son to redeem us (John 3:16) and asks us to call Him our Father (Matt. 6:9) & He is one with the Son (John 14:9)

He revealed Himself as the Almighty God; the Creator who gave sight to the born blind (John 9:1-12) & stilled the sea and the wind (Mark 4:35-41) He is the Forgiver of sins, the "Life, Truth and Resurrection" He is the saviour (Matt. 1:21) His Sacrifice is alive and life-giving. He is the heavenly One who can raise us to His heaven

He introduced the Holy Spirit as the "Comforter and Helper" (John 14:26), who abides in us (John 14:17), teaches us (John 14:26), convicts the world of sin (John 16:18). He grants power to witness to Christ (Acts 1:8) & to say He is the Lord (Cor. 12:3). The Holy Scripture introduces Him as the Creator (Job 33:4) & the Life Giver (Acts 5:3-4). The Holy Spirit gave birth to the church in the Pentecost.

The Trinitarian Dogma in the Bible

- God created us as rational beings. He reveals Himself and His deeds to us to elevate our minds to accept Him and acknowledge His mysteries (Mark 4:11)
- The Old and the New Testaments confirm the belief in the One God, but the Old Testament aimed to prevent worshipping idols & false gods while the New Testament deepens our faith in God by revealing the "Trinitarian" faith.
 - * Isaiah's Vision stated "Holy Holy Holy" (6:3) and also "who will go for us" (6:8)
 - * The Plurality in God's words ex. "let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26)
 - * The Holy Trinity is referred to at Jesus' baptism (John 1:27-33)
 - * Our baptism too is performed in the name of the Three Hypostases (Matt.28:19)
 - * St. Paul's benediction enumerates them in 2 Cor. 13:14
 - * The Three are spoken of in John 14:16; Eph. 2:18; 1Pet. 1:21, 22; etc.

The First Trinitarian Formulas

- Before His ascent to heaven, Our Lord commanded His disciples to baptize men in the name (not names) of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He gave the baptismal formula simply without calling it "Hypostasis" (Matt. 28:19)
- St. Paul says: "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:13)
- In the apostolic age, the main theme of the church worship was to witness for the salvation of the Lord Who ascended to His Father's Bosom & sent us the Holy Spirit

The Holy Trinity

To understand this great mystery we can simply say:

- God is the only "Being" who is "self existent. This divine being “the Father” who exists eternally; He has a "Mind," "Wisdom" or "Logos (Word)," begotten from His "Being" and has the same one will (John 10:30) and He is alive by His Holy Spirit
- Jesus Christ, the Word of God is begotten from Him as light is begotten of light, and is one with the Father in the same divine essence (Heb. 1:3)
- The Holy Spirit is the mediator by whom mankind receives enlightenment and son ship through Christ (Rom. 8:15-19)
- The unity of the Holy Trinity is unique: Three Hypostases have one clear divine Essence. Each One fills the Others and is contained in Them but is distinguished from Them.
- The Father works through the Son in the Spirit; the Son works, as the power of the Father and the Holy Spirit works, because He is the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

Examples from the Creation

1. Man is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; 5:2); his soul is existent, rational and alive. Although man has one soul and its being is distinguished from its mind and life, the three are inseparable.
2. God promises to be a wall of fire around the church (Zech. 2:5). Fire has the flame, the light that is begotten of the flame, and the heat that proceeds out of it. These three are not hypostases for the one does not fill the others
3. Jesus is the “Sun of Righteousness” (Malachi 4:2). The sun brings forth rays and heat, but is one sun. We call the star itself the sun its rays and its heat are also called the sun.

Conclusion

Faith in the Holy Trinity is the basic dogma of the whole Christian structure. The fathers of the church did their best to explain this mystery. One God is preached in the Church; Self existing and the source of all existence (Father), speaks through His Word (Son) and living by His Spirit (Holy Spirit)

Activities/Discussion Points

1. Discuss the heresies of Arius, Macedonius, Eusabius & Apolinarius regarding the relationship between the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit.
2. Study the statements of faith approved by the fathers of the 1st & 2rd Ecumenical Councils